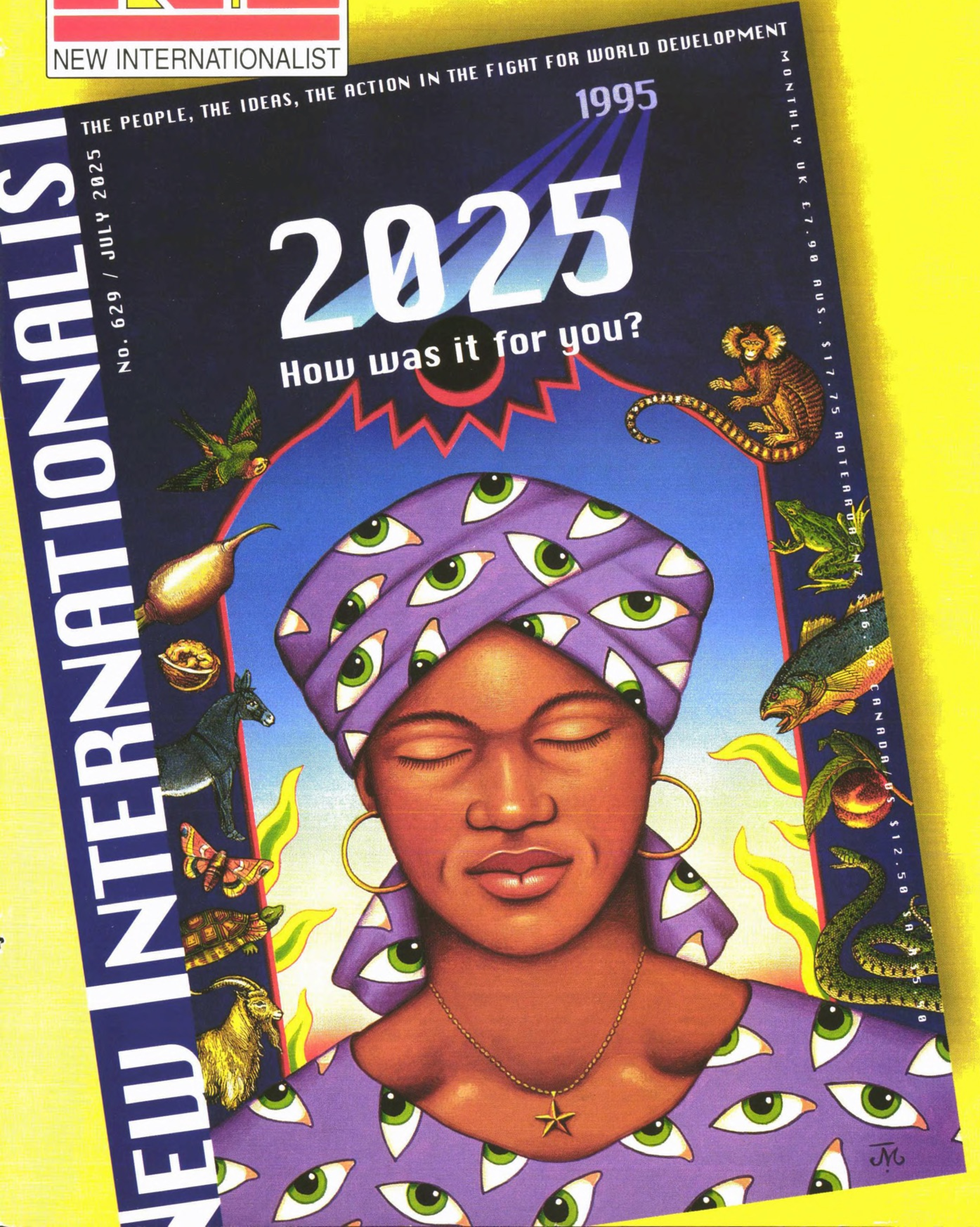
No. 269 / JULY 1995

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Back to the future


THE PEOPLE, THE IDEAS, THE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR WORLD DEVELOPMENT
1995
No. 629 / JULY 2025
2025
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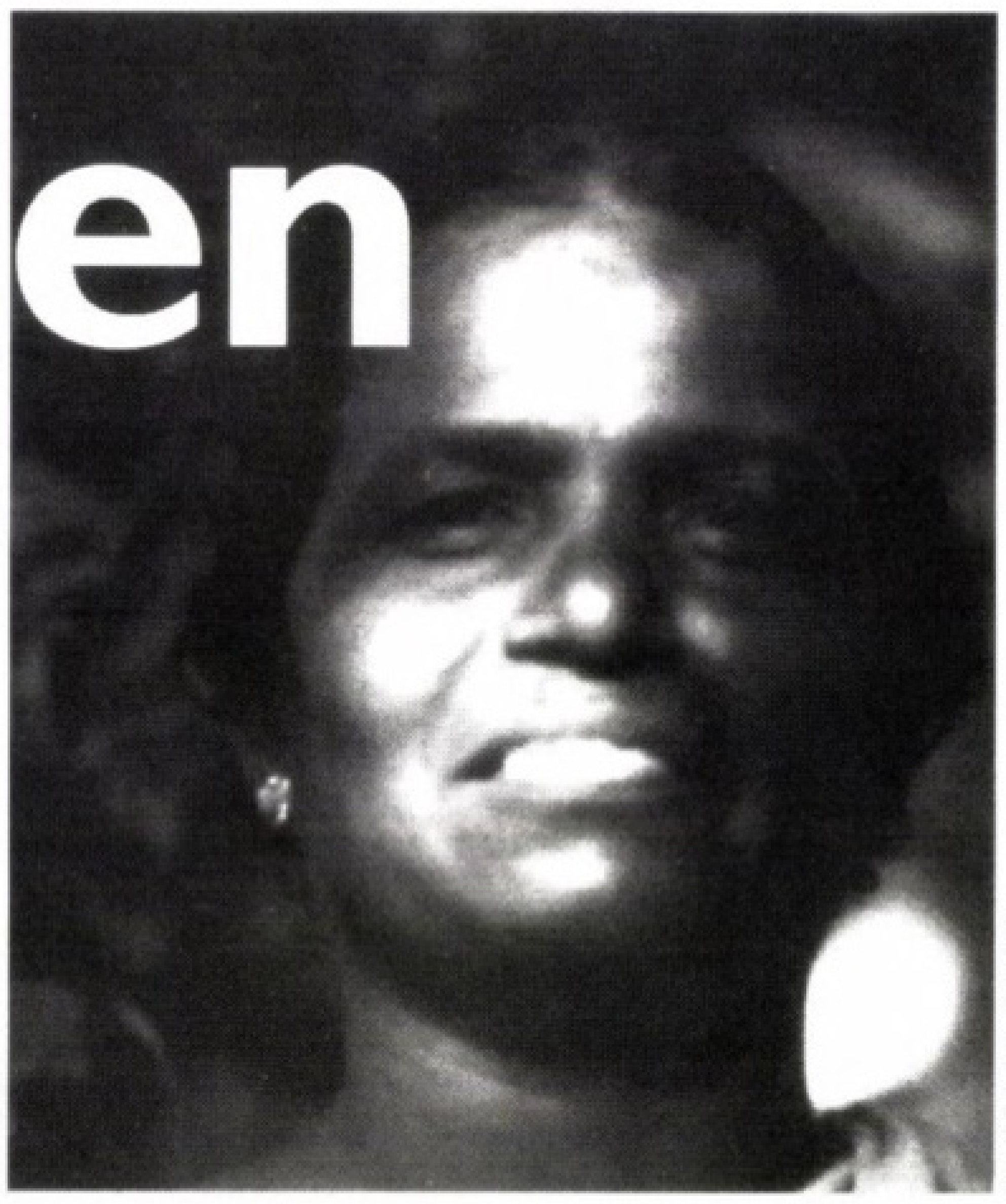
COMING NEXT MONTH

Women


VANESSA BAIRD

Is feminism dead? Are women going forward or being pushed back? In the run-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in September, the **NI** assesses the main issues affecting women today.

- **Under my thumb** – Fundamentalism comes in many guises. But a primary objective is always the control of women. The **NI** looks at right-wing agendas in the US, Algeria and India.
- **My country is woman** – A personal piece from Croatia on life in the war zone.
- **Recipe for success** – How to reach the pinnacles of power. Step one: be born a man. If this is not possible then start with a good sprinkling of money…
- **No woman no cry** – Domestic violence is everywhere. In the US a woman is beaten every 18 minutes. A campaign in Papua New Guinea aims to change hearts – and fists.
- **The daughters of feminism** – Young women tell their older 'sisters' what they think of them…
- **Sista Ansa** – A Jamaican cartoon on life and debt.
- **No going back** – Women in Tigray are determined not to give up the rights that they won during the war.

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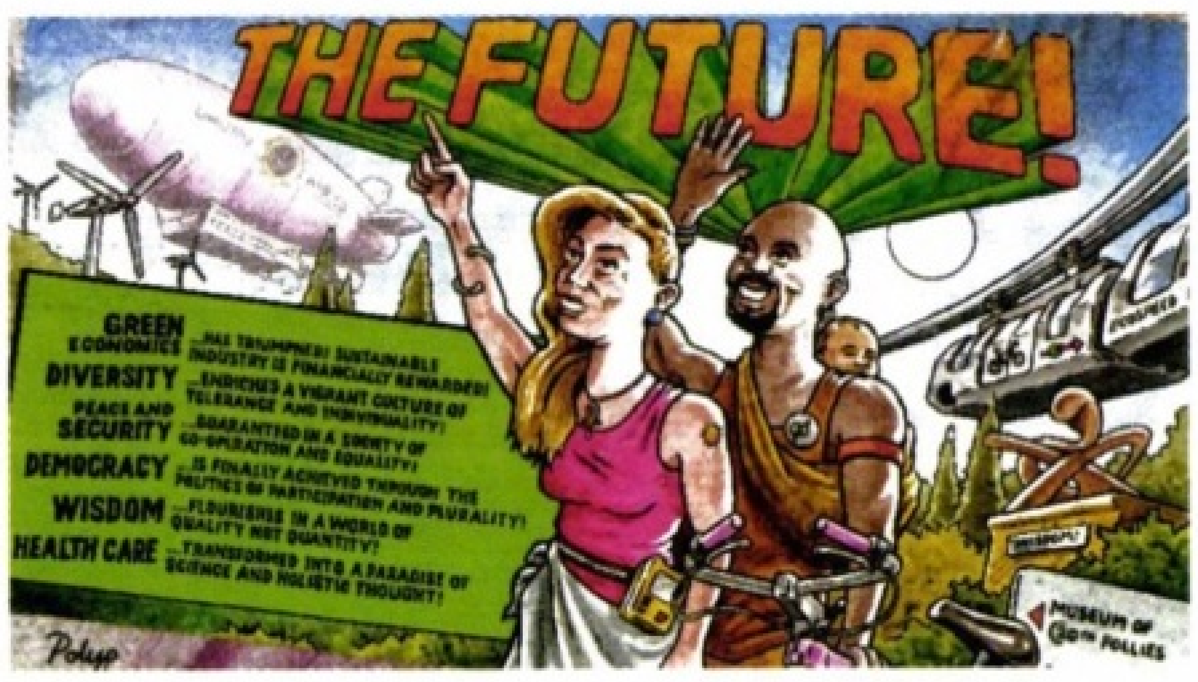
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DEMOCRACY ...IS FINALLY ACHIEVED THROUGH THE POLITICS OF PARTICIPATION AND PLURALITY!
WISDOM ...FLOURISHES IN A WORLD OF QUALITY NOT QUANTITY!
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Polyp

PJ POLYP

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FRONT COVER CONCEPT BY **PHIL WARR**
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **IAN NIXON**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

The Future

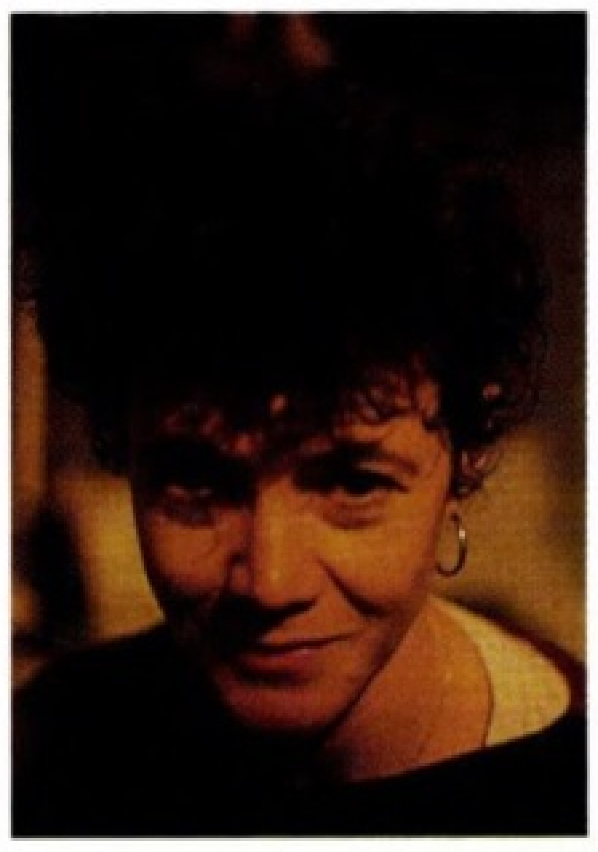
FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

It's not often that an editor of this magazine gets the chance to say to contributors: 'Give your imagination a free rein! This is fiction!'

It's an even rarer joy to get their stories landing on your desk a month or so later and finding they are as fun, thoughtful, anarchic and unpredictable as you had hoped. Some even manage to be all these things at once.

The idea was to get a handful of imaginative, international writers to project themselves to the year 2025 and write a story on a particular theme from there.

We made a point of commissioning novelists, poets and essayists capable of 'big' thoughts – rather than 'big thinkers' who might be persuaded to turn their hand to fiction.



Some of the contributors are more widely known than others. Both Eduardo Galeano and Nawal El Saadawi, for example, are friends of the magazine who have written for us before. Others are, I hope, on their way to getting the recognition they deserve.

For some of the writers it was their first foray into futuristic writing – and they took to it like ducks to water. The styles and approaches of the writers varied widely. Indian feminist and cartoonist Manjula Padmanabhan went completely wild, satirical and outrageous. Jamal Mahjoub chose a quieter, poetic, metaphysical approach. Kirkpatrick Sale combined a confessional style with echoes of the Old Testament. While Evelyn Conlan plumped for more gritty, first-person social realism.

Getting hold of published fiction writers in the first place was itself a bit like entering a time warp. A commissioning process that usually takes about a week to 10 days took about a month. Communication between publishers, agents and their authors appeared at times to be by carrier pigeon. By the time some of them got back to me the future was, in a manner of speaking, 'commissioned'.

Working on this issue has been a strange and slightly contradictory experience for me. Planning for the future is really not my forté: living more impulsively in the present is my preference. I tend to see people who meticulously plan everything ahead as setting themselves up for failure – or worse still, boredom. But thinking imaginatively and creatively about the future seems a different kettle of fish. And finding ways of sorting out the problems we may pass on to future generations is going to require more imagination than prosaic planning skills.

Judging by the contributors to this magazine – both writers and illustrators – imagination is a natural resource that still seems to be in good supply. And it is wholly appropriate that an issue on the future should have turned out to be one of the least predictable to produce.

Vanessa Baird

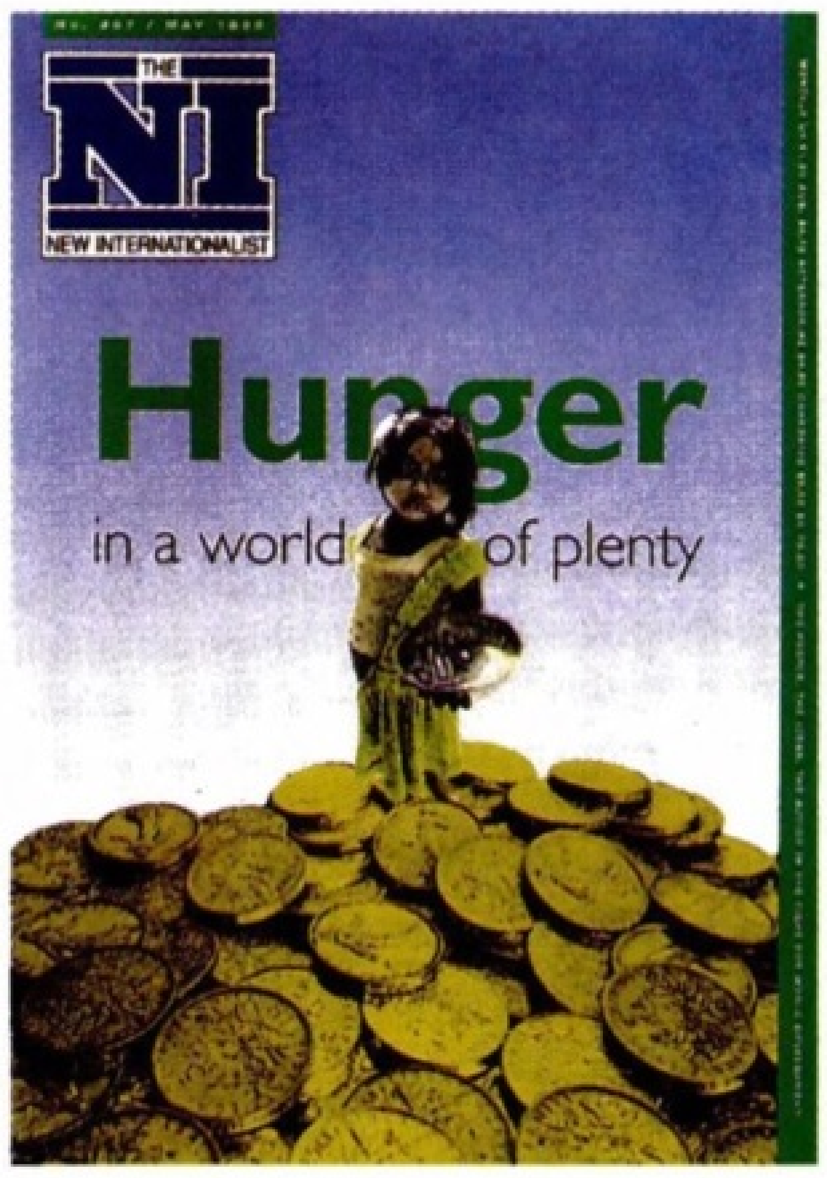
Vanessa Baird
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

No 'fair' markets

Your issue on *Hunger* (**NI 267**) only went a very small part of the way towards offering a solution. It is quite right to say that there is no such thing as a 'free' market, but unfortunately you then go on to call for a 'fair' market. However, markets cannot be fair either: they inevitably favour the rich and powerful who own and control the means of wealth production. The only answer is to do away with the market altogether. If production took place solely to satisfy human need, with free access to what had been produced, there could be no possibility of the obscene situation whereby hunger exists within a world of plenty.



Paul Bennett
Manchester, England

Victims' rights

In Ian Kentzer's *Endpiece* (**NI 267**) he says that Britain has more people serving sentences of life imprisonment than the rest of the European Union put together. You also suggest that this is an abuse of the human rights of convicted murderers who may vary from being a battered wife who strikes out in desperation to a cold-blooded professional killer.

It is worth noting that Britain has the lowest murder rate of any major country in the European Union, so apparently in this case punishment works. Victims have rights too!

It is also important to note that a person sentenced to life imprisonment can serve anything from seven years to life and that the verdict of manslaughter is also available to the courts. The sentence for manslaughter is left to the discretion of the judge. Thus in fact the courts have a wide variety of options open to them in dealing with the different types of killing that come to their notice.

JP Lethbridge
Birmingham, England

Why bother?

I disagree with Ryan Stanley's comments (*Letters,* **NI 267**) concerning your practice of showing Tibet as a separate country from China.

To his question 'Why bother?', I would have liked him to be present when I showed a copy of the *New Internationalist* to an exiled Tibetan friend of mine. On reading the magazine and seeing the rightful recognition of his country's borders, he was overwhelmed with heartfelt surprise and happiness.

'Fiddling with lines on a map' may not change the world but it continues to remind us that support for Tibet is vital at a time when there are reports of increasing human rights violations and nuclear testing by China. And it is happening *now*. As the third generation of Tibetan children are born in exile, their sense of identity vitally needs to be supported not eroded by Western tacit acceptance of China's atrocities.

Rebecca Smith
Oxford, England

Boycott

We write in the aftermath of Nick Ingram's execution in the State of Georgia, US.

Burglary, tying the victims to a tree and shooting them at point-blank range are horrific actions, but how can the state take the moral high ground when it is prepared to incarcerate a man for 12 years while he contemplates the manner of death which the state will inflict? Then, at the end, the 'cat and mouse' stays on execution before finally the deed is done.

Even if we leave the physical and mental torture of Nick Ingram out of the equation, we wonder what possible purpose can be served by inflicting a lifetime of unimaginable suffering and bereavement on his innocent family.

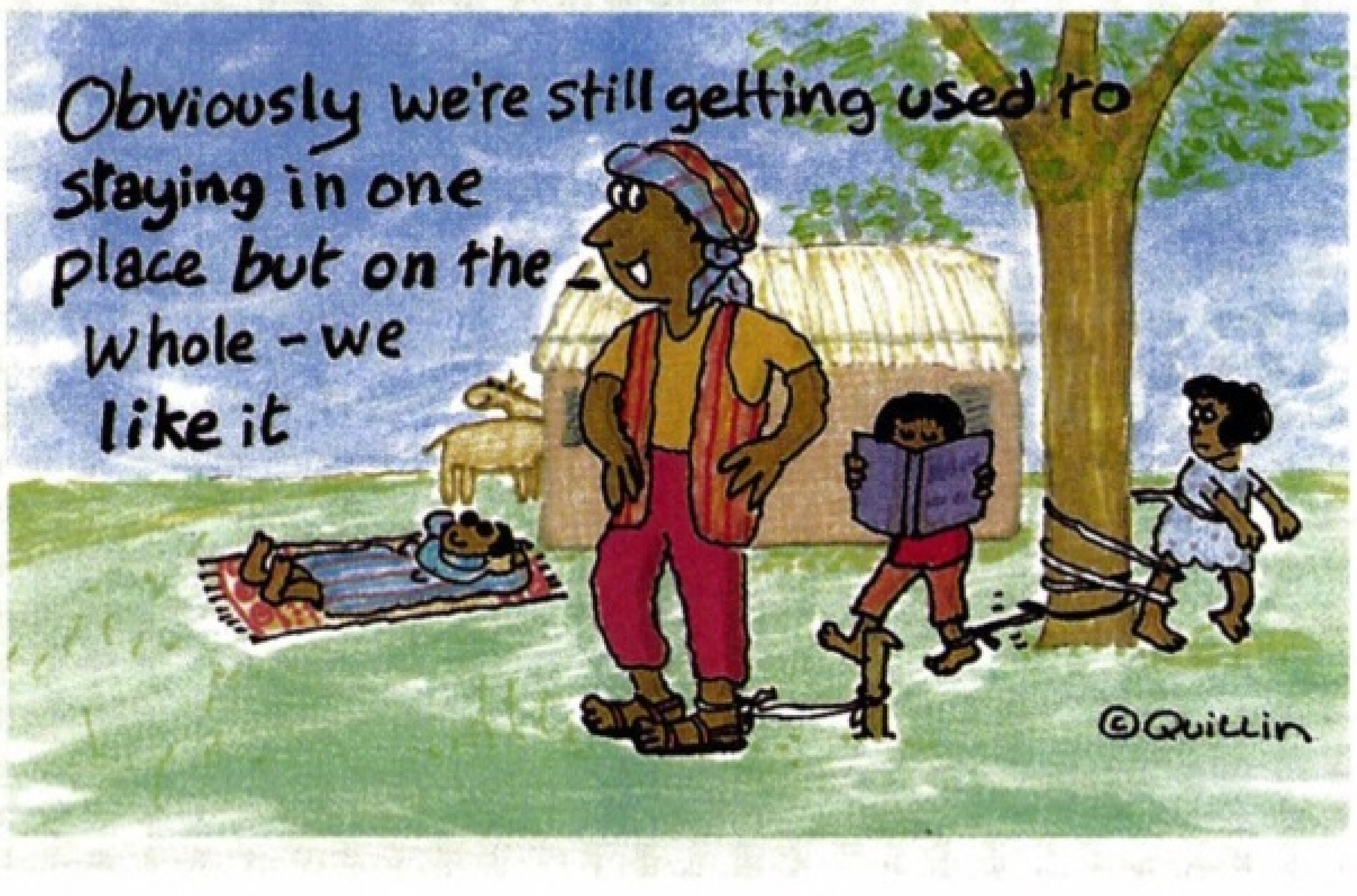
We have decided to boycott American products and services until the death penalty is repealed and all outstanding capital sentences are commuted. We have written to President Clinton and the US Embassy in London informing them of this. Perhaps like-minded readers will do the same.

Debbie and **Peter Wakeham**
Luton, England.

Aiding nomads

Having read your recent issue on *Nomads* (**NI 266**), I received some information from Action Aid which raised an interesting argument. Having ascertained that trying to pin down nomadic people was destructive and that in fact their lifestyle is far less harmful to the environment than our own, I go on to read that Action Aid are aiming to settle pastoralists in Uganda as mobility contributes to poor animal health and persistent low levels of education in children. Interviews with the newly-settled people reflected their satisfaction with their new lifestyle.

Rebecca Taylor
Sheffield, England


Obviously we're still getting used to staying in one place but on the whole - we like it
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VIV QUILLIN

Donor's dilemma

I was confounded by the example of profligate spending by the Pakistan Government (*Lethal Lies* **NI 261**) where the cost of 43 aircraft 'could have provided safe water for two years for all the 55 million people who lack it…'

This immediately raises the problem faced by those who contribute to charity – does one contribute to provide services that any decent government should be providing anyway? This leads on to a supplementary question – by providing essential services to destitute people who are so because their government is corrupt, are we a) allowing that government to continue to misuse its funds to the further detriment of its people and b) delaying the imperative moment when these abused people feel that they need to take action against their corrupt government?

Stan Knafler
Lincoln, England

Bad burgers

McDonalds, the burger chain, aims to boost its store numbers in Australia to 400 by 1996. Meanwhile there has been an important development in Britain relating to the litigation

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involving McDonalds and a valiant young couple determined to highlight some facts that expose the company. For example, they say that although McDonalds operate in 45 countries and make a profit of $45 million, their fast food is as low on nutrition as it is high on unhealthy fats.

There have been protests about the company in the Philippines, Italy and Sweden and complaints in Britain where its workers are among the lowest-paid. More than 75 per cent are under 21, often working long hours on a part-time basis which means that they don't get paid sickness or holiday pay. McDonalds is strongly anti-union and boasts that it knows of no unions in its British stores.

None of this has been reported in Australia. I and many others would like to pierce the blackout that there is here on these developments in Britain.

Norman Taylor
Adelaide, Australia

Michele Turner

This letter is to let you know, belatedly, of the tragic death of Michele Turner. Her book *Telling: Personal Testimonies from East Timor 1942-1992* brought many people to activism on the East Timor issue. It is a deeply-moving account which gave Michele a deep and lasting connection with the East Timorese communities here in Australia.

I urge all readers to look back to the excellent issue on *East Timor* **(NI 253)** and read the personal accounts taken from Michele's book.

At the Australia-East Timor association we knew Michele as an activist and a friend. To all those who knew her, especially her family, we send our condolences.

Stephen Langford,
Australia-East Timor Association,
Darlinghurst, New South Wales,
Australia

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

LETTER FROM **INGUSHETIA**

In hot water

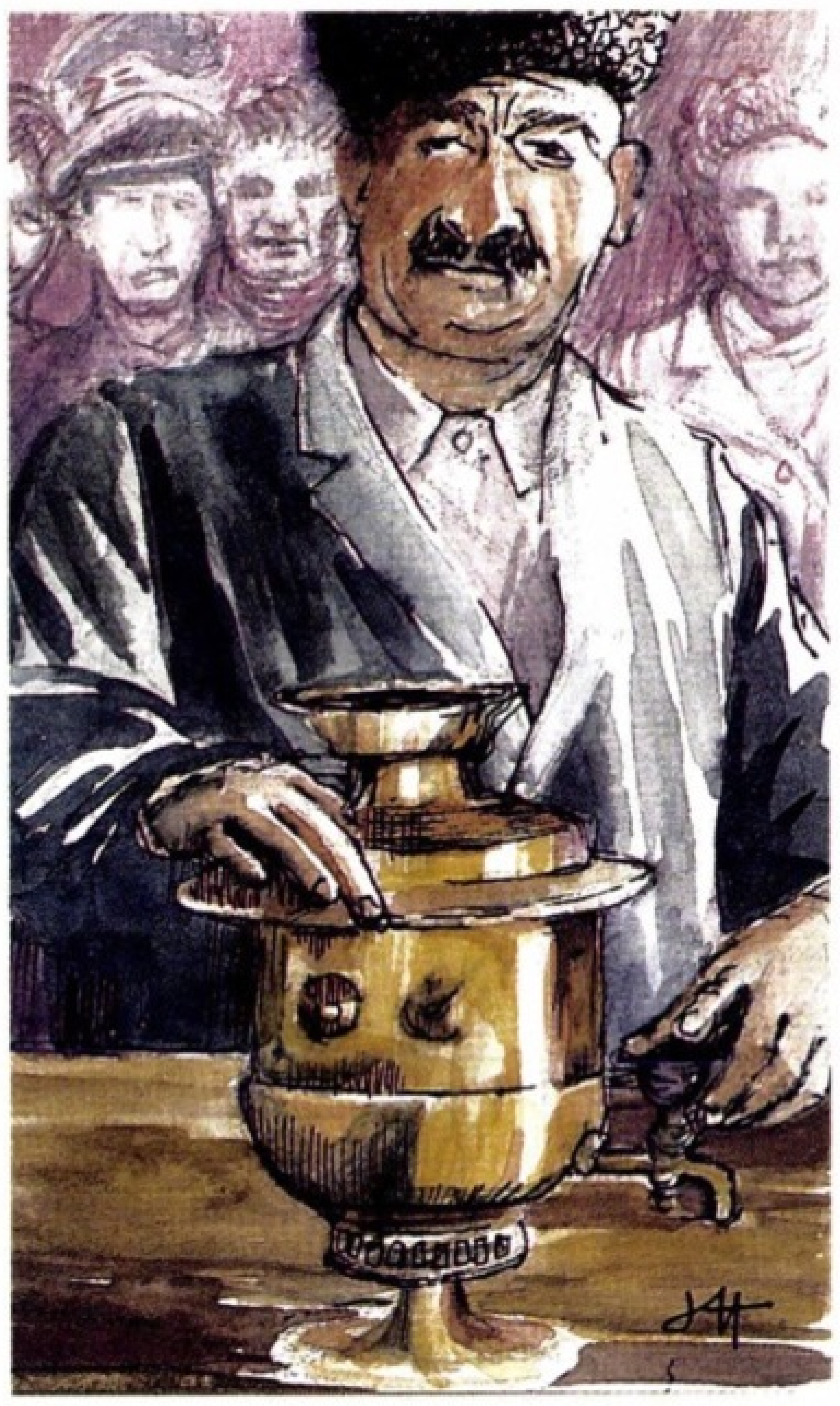
In her vain attempt to keep clean, **Olivia Ward** faces Big Brother and undergoes a personality change.

NAZRAN. The dirt in my hair is shifting to my fingernails everytime I run my fingers through it. Half the dust of Chechnya has migrated west to Ingushetia via my person. Three days of choking travel through the arid conflict zone has left me as gritty as old sandpaper.

'Moussa,' I beg, '*please* could I have some hot water?'

The tone is right. It's pleading and with just the right note of desperation.

Five minutes later I am rewarded. By working at top speed I am able to wash and rinse my hair, apply the shower to the rest of me, and hop out of the bath before the bonanza ends. One minute later the water runs cold.



JUDY HAMMOND

This struggle for basic services is emotionally exhausting, adding to the strain of life in the war zone. But here in the hinterland of the Soviet Union, there is no alternative to the status quo. If you want anything done, you have to follow the rules.

Choking back my anger and impatience, I have learned to live in a microcosm of the old communist system whose axiom is 'anybody with power will use it – to the fullest.'

As manager of one of the only three guesthouses in town, Moussa wields supreme power. Without his permission I cannot bathe, eat, sleep, or find a place to write. I cannot use the hissing, erratic telephone or visit with friends.

Arriving from the West, and more recently from Nouveau Moscow, I have to forget my easy ways. This is the way it is, was, is now and will be for the foreseeable future.

Here we are all equal under the authoritarian command of the house manager. That is to say, we are like the dust that has so gratifyingly floated down the drain in my shower.

'You may sit in the kitchen while you eat,' Moussa tells me for the fiftieth time. 'But this place doesn't belong to you, so you have to take tea in your room.'

This stringent requirement is in fact an improvement. When I arrived two weeks before, I was allowed only to slink into the kitchen and put a match to the kettle. But after a number of prison-like suppers of stale bread and too-salty cheese I was emboldened to ask for more.

Like all Soviet workers I knew that demanding my rights (after all I was paying for this odd imitation of a hotel) was useless. I must either wheedle or bribe. One wrong word and I would be exiled to the bathless, bedless, telephoneless gulag outside the guest house.

The humbling experience of living in a past when individual needs and competition weren't supposed to exist bears down on me like an oppressive force. The very embodiment of Big Brother, Moussa is always there, timing my meals, intruding on my meetings, doling out hot water in teaspoons, listening to my phonecalls. He filters through my waking moments and my dreams.

To my surprise, I am becoming the person Moussa wants me to be. My speech is deferential and embarrassingly girlish. I giggle at jokes that fell flat ten years ago. I ask solicitously about the health and daily pursuits of a man who is a bore and a blowhard. In short, I am a Soviet cynic.

The realization amuses as it depresses me. For two years I've puzzled over the strange combination of cynicism and apathy that infects Russia, paralysing even those who want to change. Now I know more than I've ever hoped to learn.

Preparing to leave, I wonder if there is still time to break out of the system, fly in the face of the authoritarian past as I've hoped others would do. Time to tell Moussa he lives in a house of cards.

I pick up my bullet-proof vest and thump down the stairs to his small, neatly-ordered desk. The clattering cab will be waiting to take me to the airport. The moment of truth has arrived.

Moussa looks at me and his grimly-lined face breaks into a smile.

'It was good having you to stay with us,' he says. 'You're a fine guest. I will give you top priority if you come again.'

I begin to laugh as he shakes my hand. I am laughing as the cab rolls up to the airport door. As the airplane engine roars I hear the voice of millions, chuckling quietly in the darkening afternoon. ■

Olivia Ward is the Moscow bureau chief of the *Toronto Star*.

Update

ENVIRONMENT

Frontal assault

Threat to the forest in Honduras

Twenty thousand poverty-stricken Honduran farmers are packing their guns, chainsaws, machetes and belongings and preparing to move home – into the heart of virgin rainforest. Their arrival will not be welcome. The forest is already home to some 40,000 indigenous people whose traditional land rights have been repeatedly violated.

'These colonists will quickly convert forests to pasture, decimate wildlife and force the people from their land,' says Osvaldo Munguia, director of MOPAWI, the Honduran conservation and development group.

La Mosquitia is a remote area of forests, swamps and lagoons in the east of Honduras. The Government's plans to resettle landless farmers in the Sico and Paulaya river valleys have devastating implications. The settlement encroaches on the Río Plátano reserve, declared a World Heritage Site by the UN. At 5,250 square kilometres it is the largest remaining area of continuous forest in the country and a critical habitat for endangered species such the harpy eagle and giant ant-eater. Areas of La Mosquitia previously opened up to colonization are now little more than treeless wastelands.

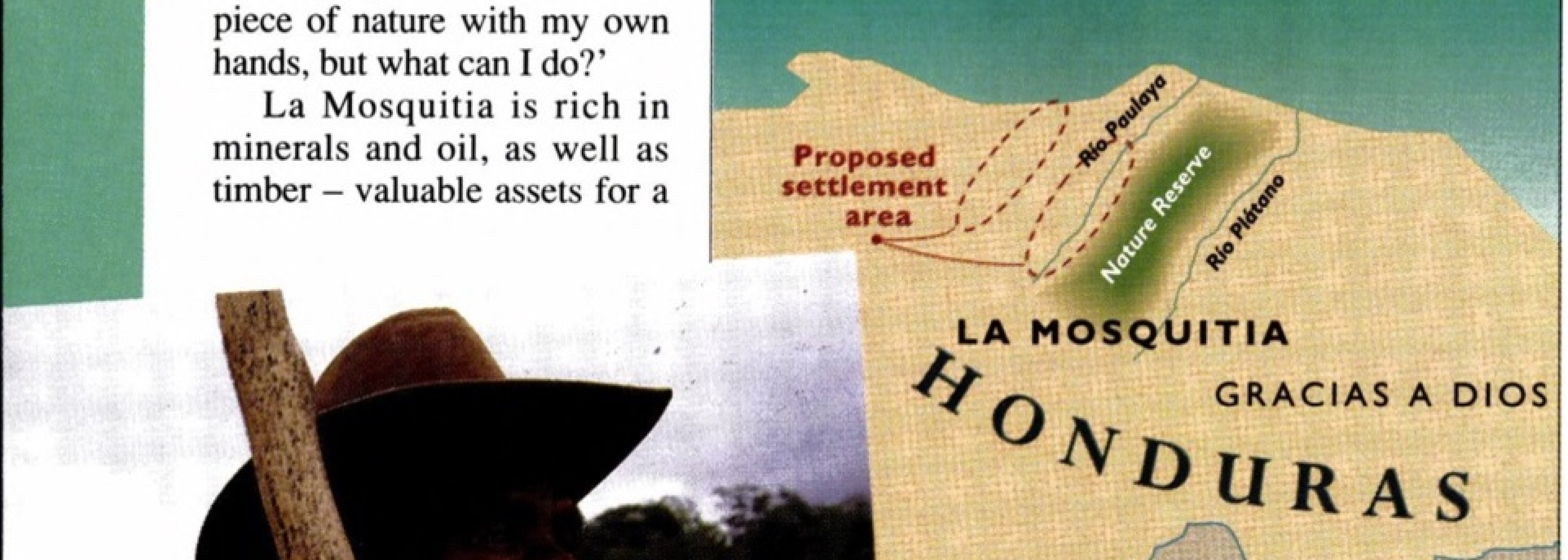
'No government has ever successfully halted or even slowed the deforestation front,' says Munguia. Thousands of colonists have already moved into the area. One farmer said: 'I am destroying this marvellous piece of nature with my own hands, but what can I do?'

La Mosquitia is rich in minerals and oil, as well as timber – valuable assets for a country expected to service a $2.6 billion foreign debt. Desperate for cash, successive governments have handed out concessions to mining, oil and logging companies. Politicians, the military and police have taken large tracts of land for their own use.

But perhaps the greatest threat to La Mosquitia is the roads the Government plans to build. So far, the region's salvation has been its isolation. Conservation groups fear that roads will open the way for a massive invasion. While previous Honduran governments have undertaken to protect the region, the current President, Carlos Reina, says: 'Ecological concerns should not slow down a country's development.'

Osvaldo Munguia disagrees: 'It is only our ability to protect the environment that will secure sustainable development and our future well-being.' MOPAWI recently exposed a toxic waste-disposal firm that had gained access to the region by posing as a shrimp-processing factory. Just three years ago massive public outcry turned away a multinational logging company; campaigners wore pine cones as a symbol of their protest. ■

Tim Hamilton/Tear Fund



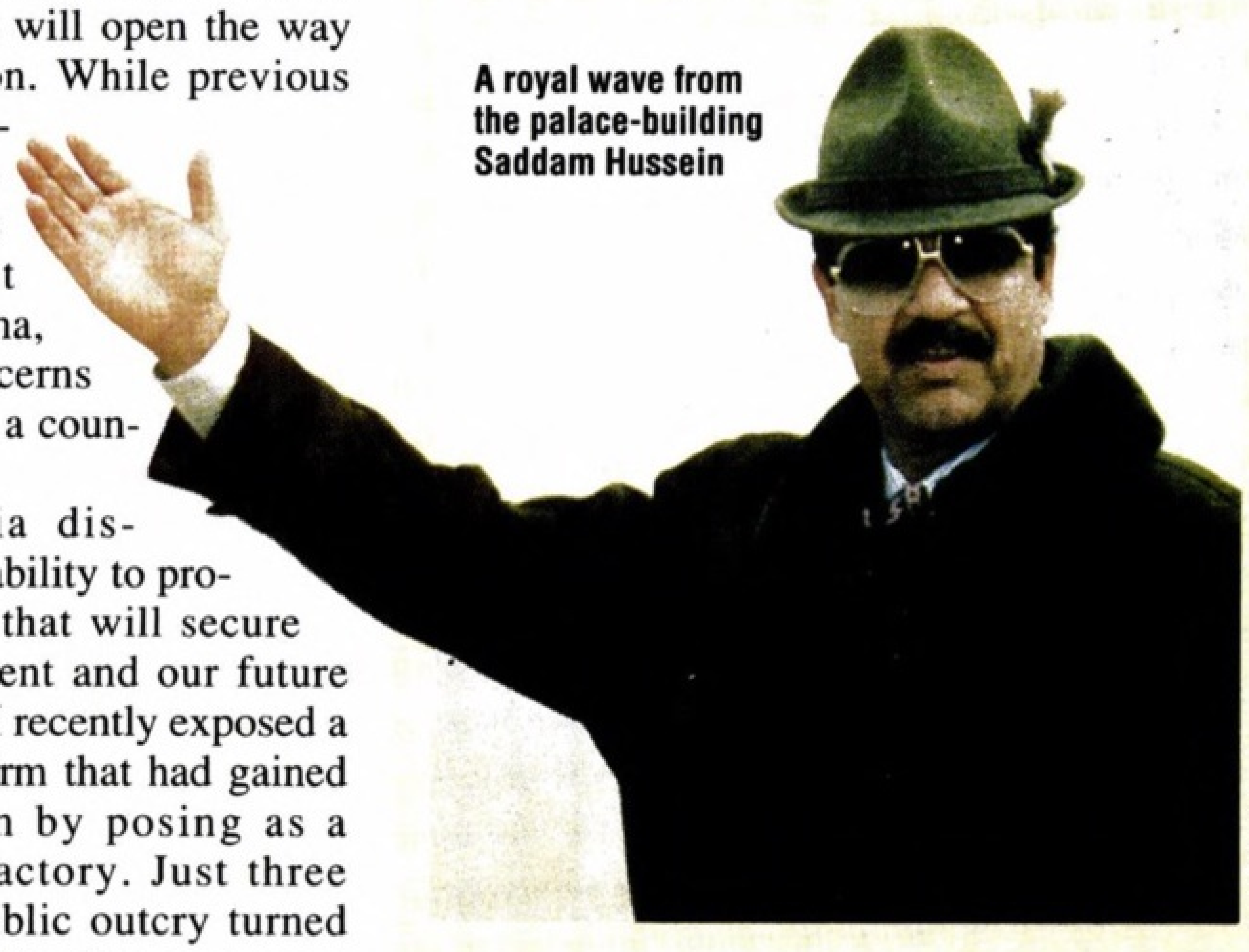
TEAR FUND

Bananas

Multinational companies are waging a war to control Somalia's lucrative banana trade, using armed guards reminiscent of the country's warring militias. The US-based company Dole and an Italian-owned competitor have enlisted armed 'technicals' to protect their shipments. When Dole felt plantation owners were reneging on contracts, General Muhammad Farah Aidid was asked to referee. His faction controls most of the banana-growing region. It now approves every agreement and pockets kickbacks as well. Business circles figure that Aidid's income from the banana wars keeps his troops fed and ensures his survival.

World Press Review vol 42 no 5

Palatial parks



A royal wave from the palace-building Saddam Hussein

IMAPRESS

According to Saudi Arabia's pro-government newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Saddam Hussein is building a Baghdad palace for his wife in public parks that run along the Tigris river. Just a few months ago another palace was completed in the chic residential district of Al-Harithiyah. The building originally housed the Agricultural Museum. Iraq's state-controlled media have dubbed these lavish constructions, built with Italian marble and other costly materials, 'people's palaces'. Most of the Iraqi people, hit by UN sanctions as well as Saddam Hussein, are completely impoverished.

World Press Review vol 42 no 5

Shortlist

A new report accuses the major arms-exporting nations of ambiguity in their export policies. The report analyses the lists of countries regarded as 'sensitive destinations' by Britain, the US, Germany and Japan. These lists reveal very little about the practical operation of export controls. Out of a total of 72 countries designated as 'sensitive' almost half appear only on one or two of the lists. So potential proliferators may be refused access to some technologies by one government only to be granted it by another.

'Proliferation and Export Controls' from Saferworld, London, Tel: (171) 580 8886

Dished

Swiss chef Leon Marmy thinks he has trumped the more celebrated culinary achievements of his French contemporaries. He has invented foie d'escargot, the 'world's first liver-of-snail dish'. For the Alpine snail population, however, the cost is high. It takes 2,000 hunch-backs to produce one pound of moussed snail livers. 'People shouldn't expect it to taste like liver,' says Marmy. 'But, on the other hand, it doesn't taste like snail either.'

World Press Review vol 42 no 5

Premium

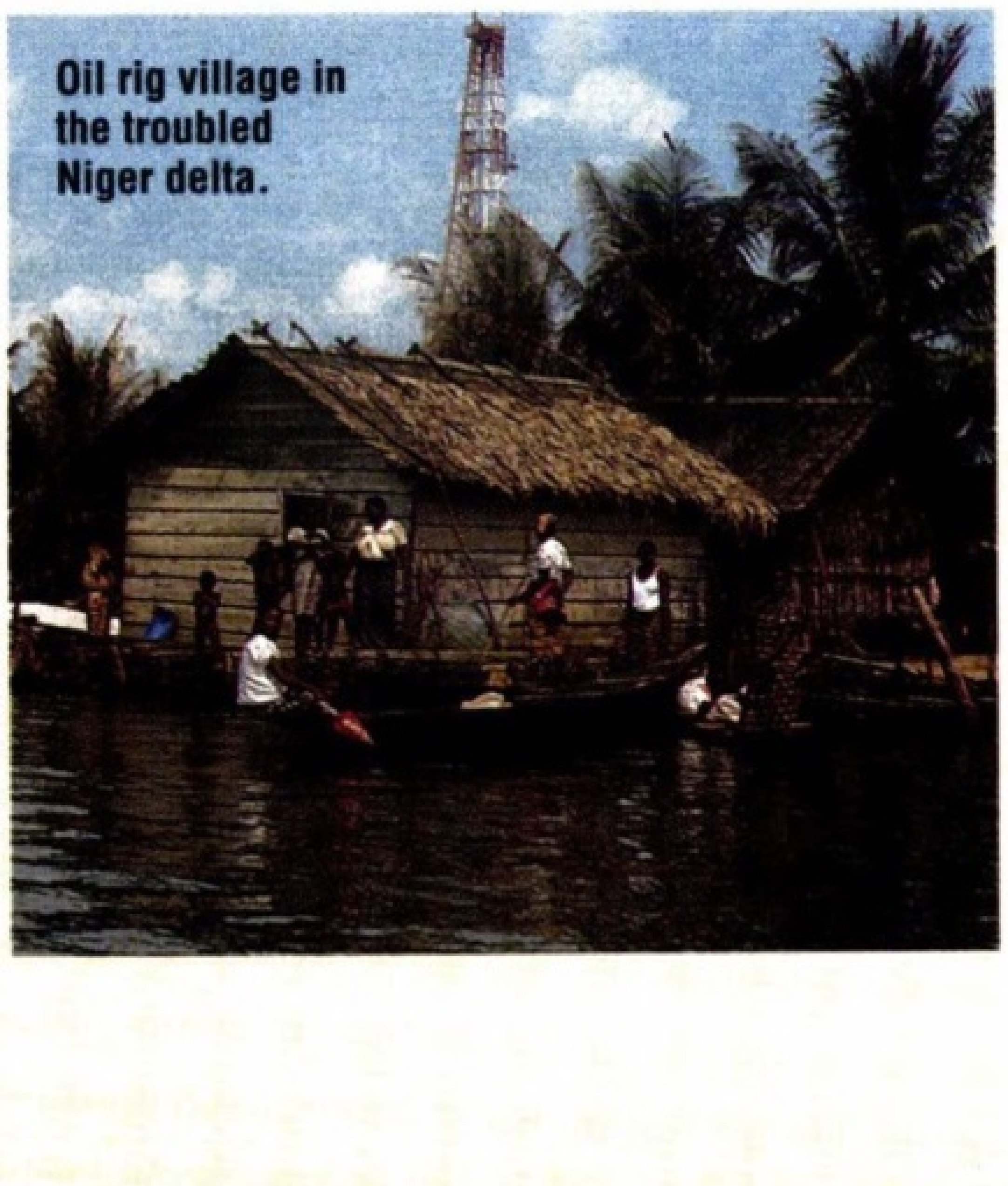
Women in Britain routinely pay 50 per cent more than men for private health insurance, despite the fact that women take better care of their health and make fewer claims.

Everywoman no 114

Fake

Walter Ofonogoro, Minister of Information in the Nigerian Government, believes that 'misguided misinformation' surrounding the fate of 500,000 Ogoni people in the oil-rich Niger Delta (see NI 256) is part of an 'international conspiracy' orchestrated by the CIA and MI5 to 'destabilize' his country. Ofonogoro and his entourage flew in from Lagos 'at personal expense' to tell a public meeting in Oxford that the Nigerian military had intervened in Ogoniland 'to save the Ogoni people from killing themselves'. Confronted with a photograph of the detained Ogoni leader Ken Saro-wiwa clearly showing the results of physical abuse, Ofonogoro declared it to be a fake. 'As the owner of 30 television stations,' he added, 'I know how easily such fakes can be produced'. No hard evidence was forthcoming, however, to suggest that the advent of 'oil wealth' had brought anything to the Ogoni people other than the destruction of their environment by the oil giant Shell, and violent repression by the Nigerian military dictatorship. Bill Morris, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union – one of Britain's largest – asked the same meeting to support a boycott of Shell products because, in addition to its record in Ogoniland, the company refuses to recognize trade-union rights.

David Ransom



Oil rig village in the troubled Niger delta.

SARA LEIGH LEWIS / PANOS

HUMAN RIGHTS

PIERRE ZAKREWSKI

Disappeared: India has been arresting 150 Kashmiri separatists a day.

Catch and kill

Bleak outlook in Kashmir

Kashmir has the unfortunate distinction of hosting the largest occupation force in the world: 600,000 Indian troops – one-sixth of the entire Indian Army – crammed into an area half the size of Belgium. As the Indian Government struggles to maintain its authority in the face of continued calls for self-determination, troop levels have risen to one Indian soldier for every three Kashmiris.

When elements of the Kashmiri cause began to adopt militant methods the Indian Army initiated 'Operation Tiger', dubbed 'Catch and Kill' by the resistance. The Army and the Border Security Force have been arresting up to 150 people every day. Many are held without trial, some for as long as four years. Cases documented by the Jammu & Kashmir Basic Rights Committee include numerous instances of rape, torture, custodial killings and disappearances.

In one of Srinagar's main hospitals 23-year-old Nazir Ahmed Shah told us how he was arrested in January, held for one month and eight days and tortured during the entire period. His body was covered in scars, apparently the result of electric shocks. Both his legs had been amputated as a consequence of torture; so had his fingers, after being attached to a battery for long periods.

In the next bed Saleema, aged nine, and Shaheena, aged five, had both received 40-per-cent burns after the Army set their house ablaze to intimidate their family into giving the names of suspected militants. Both have little chance of survival.

Despite a unilateral cease-fire announced last year by the JKLF (Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front) the compromise talked of by the Indian Government has so far failed to materialize. Kashmiri leaders are pessimistic. According to Azam Inqilabi, leader of Mahaz-e-Azadi – one of the main Kashmiri political parties – the younger generation will not have the patience of the older political leaders.

There are some 85 million Muslims in India. Any spread of Muslim separatism from Kashmir to the rest of the country is a daunting prospect for the Indian Government. The official view from New Delhi is that UN resolutions on the right to self determin-ation for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, passed in 1949, are outdated; the area is, and will always remain, a part of India. Accordingly the solution must lie within the framework of the Indian Constitution, not the UN.

As India seeks a more prominent international role and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council this view may have to change. But in the meantime the prospect of talks between India, Pakistan and the representatives of the Kashmiri people seems as remote as ever. ■

Stefan A Smith and **Pierre Zakrzewski**

Update

JAPAN

SEBASTIAN NAIDOO

Talking shop: Ainu campaigner and restaurateur Sato Tatsue

House of winds

Tokyo restaurant gives voice to Ainu people

IN 1986 Prime Minister Nakasone characterized Japan as a 'monoethnic' society. The idea lives on in the present Government's view that the Ainu people are a withering minority rather than an indigenous group.

There are few public places in Tokyo where people can dispute such claims and make their voices heard. So those with something to say can get swept away by the atmosphere at restaurant Rerachise, 'The House of Winds'. Beneath the campus of Tokyo's Waseda university, on a *tatami* mat-area squashed between bookshelves and the kitchen, Sato Tatsue serves up Ainu delicacies like salmon, raw deer, pounded pumpkin and spicy aubergine.

The denial of recognition and rights to the indigenous people of Ainu Moshiri (more commonly known as the northern island of Hokkaido) has been enforced by oppressive laws. As in Australia and the US, such laws have destroyed an environment-friendly lifestyle and sent the indigenous population spiralling into poverty. Like several thousand other Ainu people, Sato left her family and came to Tokyo both to escape and to change this situation.

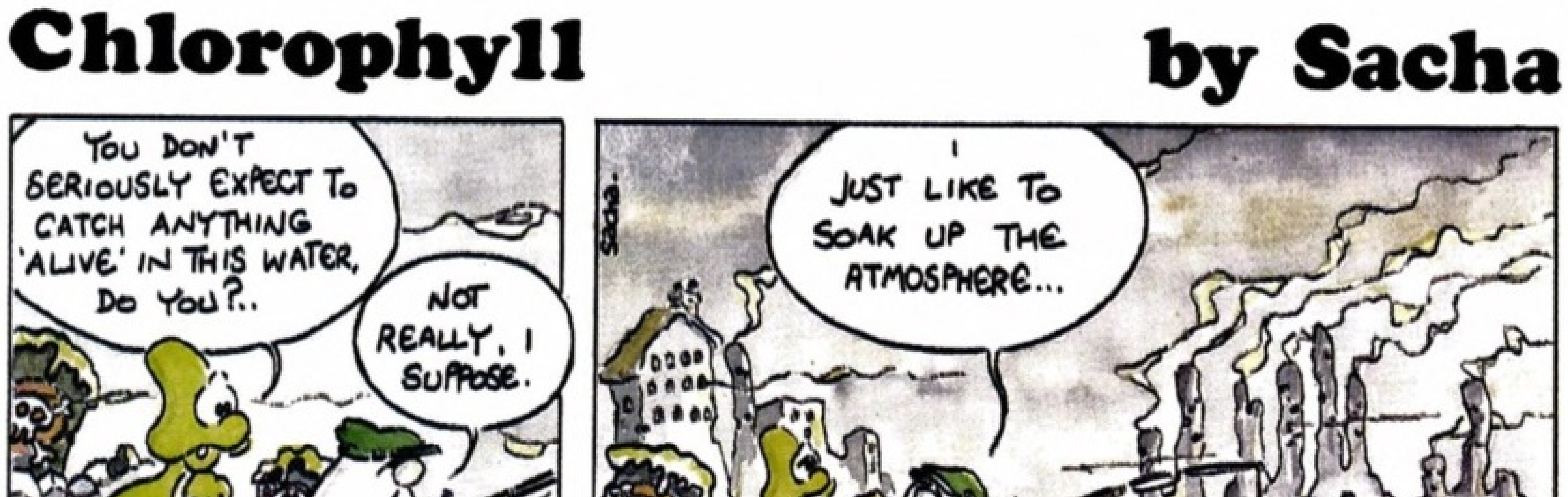
'Sitting on mats at Rerachise,' she says, 'we realize that we are all Ainu'. The word *ainu* also means human'.

Since she opened the restaurant in May 1993 Sato, an activist in her mid-70s who has never had a formal education, has created a place where her culture could not be denied. Crammed full of Waseda students during the week, and often rented out for private parties and Ainu social activities at the weekend, the restaurant plays a crucial part in giving a voice to Tokyo's Ainu population.

Sato believes that while Kayano Shigeru – who became the first Ainu member of the Japanese Government in July 1994 – can act at an official level to restore Ainu civil rights, she herself can act within the community, using Ainu recipes to provoke discussion and curb prejudice. ■

Sebastian Naidoo

Chlorophyll by Sacha


YOU DON'T SERIOUSLY EXPECT TO CATCH ANYTHING 'ALIVE' IN THIS WATER, DO YOU?..
NOT REALLY, I SUPPOSE.
JUST LIKE TO SOAK UP THE ATMOSPHERE...

Money at the margins

Africa – especially sub-Saharan Africa – is becoming ever-more marginalized. Africa's share of total world exports fell from about four per cent in 1970 to not much more than one per cent in 1990. The net outflow of capital from Africa increased from $53.5 billion in 1992 to more than $61 billion in 1993. Africa will lose an estimated $2.6 billion a year in trade as a result of liberalization under GATT. Sub-Saharan Africa's income per capita fell by a yearly average of 1.1 per cent between 1982 and 1992: its infant-mortality rate is 44 per cent higher than the average for all developing countries. Structural-adjustment programmes have cut public services, including health and education. Ethnic, religious and political strife has intensified.

Inter-Church Coalition on Africa,
129 St Clair Ave West, Toronto, ON M4V 1N5,
Tel: (416) 927 1124. Fax: (416) 927 7554

Marginalized by money: Senegalese patients paying their hospital entrance fee.

RON GILING / PANOS

Whizkids

The youngest doctor in the world is Indian-born Balamurali Ambati, who has just graduated from New York City's Mount Sinai School of Medicine at the age of 17. He will now do his residency in opthalmology at Harvard.

Meanwhile a six-year-old in a remote region of Tibet has been identified by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, who died in 1989. The Dalai has asked China to let the boy have the correct religious training. Beijing has condemned the request as negating its 'supreme authority'.

Time, vol. 145, no. 22

Quote

"Worms have played a more important part in the history of the world than persons would at first suppose."

Charles Darwin

CHRIS LAURENS / CAMERAPRESS

Two visions, two religions. Dealers 'see' the market forces that will shape the future at the London Stock Exchange (above). Voodoo believers 'see' the spiritual forces that will shape their future in Port-au-Prince graveyard (right).

MARC FRENCH / PANOS

Whose Future?

'The future isn't what it used to be', a wit once observed. **Vanessa Baird** takes a critical look at what 'the future' is becoming.

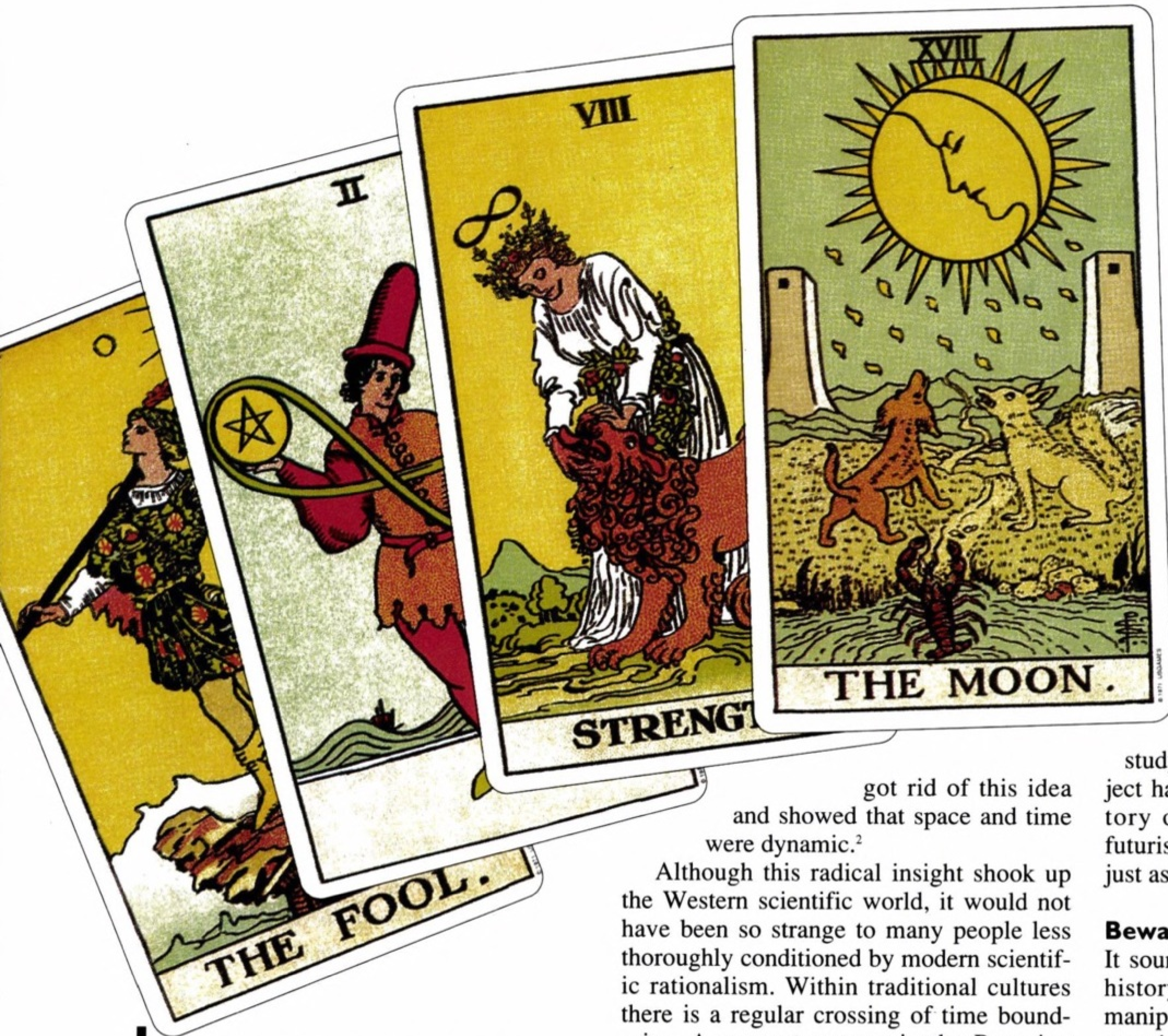
FIVE minutes to four. A bit ahead of myself. Time to kill. Check the door. No 70. Look out for tell-tale signs. A small totemic figure hanging from the doorbell. Seems promising. Feeling nervous.

She leads me into her consulting room, apologizing for the smell. 'My last client was a chain-smoker.' I'm overwhelmed not by the smell of smoke but of incense.

'I don't go up as far as 2025,' she had told me on the phone. Never mind. It's the process of looking into the future – or futurism – that I'm interested in. My motives are initially journalistic.

Anna Sandham, Tarot reader and astrologer, lays out four cards, each dealing with a general area: Spirit, Law, Earthly Matters, Romance. I choose the card relating to the area I wish to explore. I surprise myself by choosing 'Spirit'. She lays the rest of the cards face-down in an arc before me and tells me to pick 13.

When I have picked them and handed them to her she takes the first card, lays it down and interprets it.



In recent decades the Tarot has been explored as a source of psychological understanding as well as prophecy.

I know it is easy to find connections if you are looking for them – but one after another the interpretations are uncannily resonant for me. After a while I realize that although I've come to have my future told only some of the cards actually relate to the future. Some relate to the past but most relate to very personal things that are submerged in the present.

This, she explains, is because we are working largely in the realm of the unconscious. It is this that will affect the future. Afterwards I realize that a simple future projection would have been quite meaningless; that the 'future' cards make sense only in the context of the 'past' and the 'present' cards. To separate past, present and future doesn't feel relevant or meaningful.

Later I read something by W Warren Wagar, the New York State University historian and futurist. He puts it in a different way: 'Standing in the middle of a river looking upstream one sees the past. Standing in the middle of the river gazing downstream one sees the future. But it is always the same river.'[1]

Crossing boundaries

Twentieth-century physics is also telling us that rigid past, present and future divisions are not as real or useful as our timepieces suggest.

Before Albert Einstein developed the theory of relativity in 1915 space and time were thought to be fixed. Einstein's theory got rid of this idea and showed that space and time were dynamic.[2]

Although this radical insight shook up the Western scientific world, it would not have been so strange to many people less thoroughly conditioned by modern scientific rationalism. Within traditional cultures there is a regular crossing of time boundaries. A peasant woman in the Peruvian Andes will talk freely and easily about hearing *los ancianos* – the spirits of the past who inhabit the mountains – advising her on what to do in the future. Spirits are notoriously disrespectful of time-boundaries – and if spirits are part of your daily conceptual framework you probably have less regard for those boundaries too.

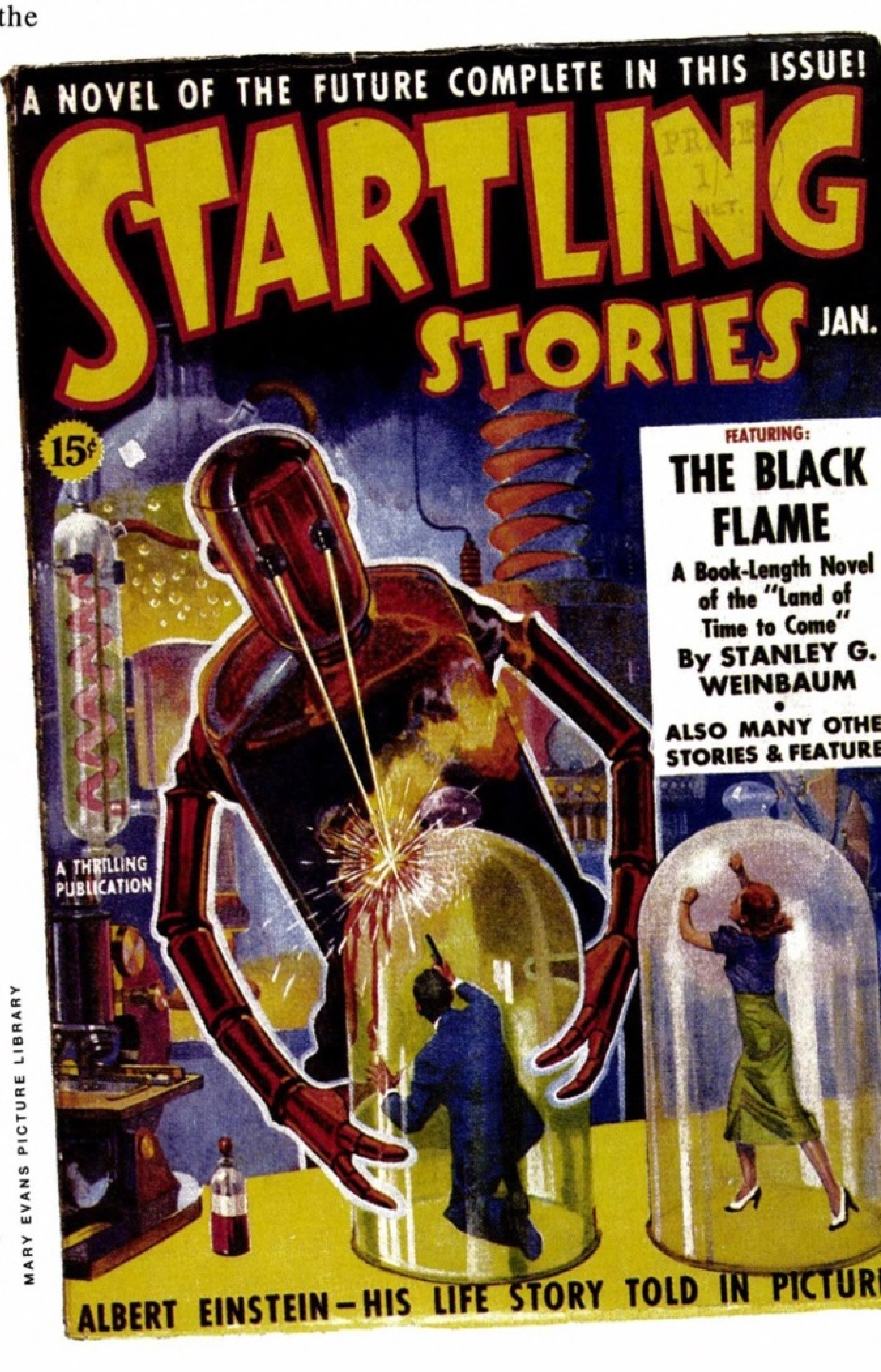
Within these traditions there is nothing weird or wacky about trying to see into the future: it is simply another way of reaching the gods. Whether reading the entrails of a sacrificial animals in Ethiopia or visiting a voodoo priest in Haiti, the attempt to divine the future is usually for moral and spiritual guidance.

In more secular societies ruminating on the future has usually been driven by intellectual curiosity and playfulness. It has been especially fertile ground for writers, whose works have ranged from fictional ideal worlds – or utopias – to popular Sci-Fi. The former enabled thinkers like Thomas More or William Morris to criticize obliquely their own societies while suggesting alternatives. Such imaginative, fictional approaches to the future have proved to be about as reliable – or unreliable – as more plodding 'probable' scenarios. In fact, that's one reason we chose to ask eight fiction writers to help us look at the world in the year 2025 in this issue of the **NI**.

But in recent years looking into the future has become more serious – 'factual', philosophical and commercial. Eager to gain academic recognition, those who study the future now argue that their subject has its place alongside others like history or geology. In their own defence futurists claim to study alternative futures just as historians study alternative pasts.

Beware, beware

It sounds fair enough, but prophecy – like history – is powerful stuff. Facts can be manipulated easily enough in the present to constitute lies. With the future the prophet has an even freer hand.



A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE!
STARTLING STORIES
JAN.
15¢
FEATURING:
THE BLACK FLAME
A Book-Length Novel of the "Land of Time to Come"
By STANLEY G. WEINBAUM
ALSO MANY OTHE
STORIES & FEATURE
A THRILLING PUBLICATION
ALBERT EINSTEIN–HIS LIFE STORY TOLD IN PICTUR

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Even George Orwell, creator of that most famous futuristic dystopia or 'reverse utopia' *1984*, came to the conclusion that futurism pandered to fear and cravings for power.[3]

This rings particularly true in a century that has seen charismatic leaders such as Hitler, Mussolini and Haiti's Papa Doc Duvalier propagating their version of the future. The fascist leader needs to create a convincing vision to mobilize people to do things they might otherwise find morally repugnant. The end has to be convincingly conjured to justify the means – even if it involves genocide. If a particular group of people are the problem, the source of fear and insecurity, they must be removed. Once people have escaped into the easy solution they can be easily dominated by it – as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslav republics today.

Historian and futurist, Warren Wagar concedes: 'Virtually all totalitarian regimes of our century have been informed by a past-centred or future-centred ideology that tells their hapless subjects precisely what the past ordains or what the future demands.'

This happens, he says, when people take a 'too rigid view of time, imagining they know more than they do'. They end up 'devaluing present life and happiness in the name of some imagined past or future felicity'.[1] It is a bit reminiscent of the Queen of Hearts' comment in *Through the Looking Glass*: 'The rule is jam tomorrow, jam yesterday – but never jam today.'

Fascism is not the only political force to conjure future visions in a manipulative way. Max Dublin, who has become one of the fiercest critics of futurism since working as a strategic planning consultant to the Canadian Government, states: 'Prophecy is a basic tool of ideology, Left or Right, East or West.'[4]

The USSR preached that communism would lead to a glorious future of a classless, egalitarian society – with plenty of promised jam. The US pointed to a different future of repeated conflict with the 'evil empire' in order to stoke up Cold War fever and justify feeding its rapacious military-industrial complex. A favoured activity of Cold War planners was to work on imagined 'wargames' which explored options for 'contained' nuclear war.

Whose business?

Today the Future is a booming business, especially in North America and Japan. With the millennium around the corner think-tanks, research groups and consultants are peddling their prophecies hard and fast to planners and policy-makers. Many claim their methods are 'scientific' and they rely heavily on computer projections. And more and more policy-makers are using their work.

JAVEED A. JAFFERTI / PANOS

Fortune-telling in India. The parrot will pick the appropriate envelope.

Dutch futurists Henk Becker and Joseph van Doorn observe that today: 'A policy-maker either uses the results of a futures research project to beat his [sic] opponents or his opponents attack him by using futures research and he needs to have this kind of research available to hit back.'

The title of a recent futurist conference in Toronto says it all: *Getting to the future first!* Newt Gingrich, right-wing Republican Speaker of the US House of Representatives takes such things to heart. He has hand-picked the US's most famous pop-futurist Alvin Toffler as a close adviser. Toffler's ideas are useful to Gingrich – especially the idea that there is going to be a great radical leap into a 'Third Wave' and this will involve dismantling a great part of government. Gingrich interprets this to justify his own hostility to state intervention in the economy and to welfare safety nets for the poor.

This alliance of politics and prophecy is nothing new. In the first century BC the Roman Senate would not make a move without consulting the book of the Sibyl, a famous collection of prophecies made by an inspired woman. Today, reports churned out by futurists serve the same function. Unfortunately, they are not churned out by inspired women – or inspired men for that matter. Instead they are produced by Western technocrats (mostly white and male) using state-of-the-art computer technology. Despite these sophisticated machines, Michael Marien, US editor of *Futures Survey*, thinks the quality of futures study has actually declined in the past 20 years. And computer projections, he says, have not helped. 'You have to start off with an assumption and if that is wrong then the whole thing will be wrong.'

Most commercial futures research assumes that competition and domination will go on being the way the world is ordered. Tacit assumptions are made based on things remaining as they are – only 'more so' in whatever direction the trend is stretched. The effect is not to broaden horizons but actually to narrow down options.

The fact is that these prophecies say a lot more about who has produced them than about any likely future. You can see how this works by looking at future projections from the last century when there was a firm belief that hot-air balloons were to be the transport technology of the twentieth century. Many of our current obsessions with 'virtual reality' may prove to be as inappropriate and risible to future generations.

Reclaiming the future

So does that mean that trying to glimpse the future is a waste of time – and a dangerous one at that?

If it means passively following the technology fads and self-interested forecasts of big business and its political allies, then yes. But it need not be that. Looking ahead can sometimes help us to think more clearly and imaginatively. It can shed light on the present and help us make the changes now that will affect the future.

Teacher Noel Wilson works with teenagers in Australia and the UK and gets them to depict what they think the

RICHARD SLYE

Today's actions, tomorrow's world. Looking ahead helps us to see the damage we are doing now.

world will be like in 30 years. After collecting examples from 600 students he was able to see a clear pattern emerging. Over half of the drawings showed computers and robots in block houses, skyscrapers and domes. Most revealed landscapes of bleak devast-ation. Nearly all were negative and dehumanised. Most had no human presence at all.[5]

What's so worrying about this sense of hopelessness – which other teachers and researchers confirm is the norm – is that it produces passivity and a sense of fatality. The despair itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy

Joanna Macy addresses this in workshops and in her book *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*. For a start, she teaches that feelings of pain for our world are natural and healthy and only morbid if denied. Information alone, she says, is not enough and unlocking repressed feelings can release energy and clear the mind. Unblocking pain for the world, she concludes, reconnects us with a larger web of life.

This is all good therapeutic stuff. In imagining the future we can get in touch with our deepest fears and desires. Then the positive work of imagining alternative scenarios and thinking about how they might be achieved can begin.

In another project, when 400 young people from different backgrounds and from different continents focused on how they would like the world to be, two images kept recurring in their utopias. One was 'boundarylessness' – a free flow of people, thought and activities unimpeded by occupational or political or national barriers. The other was of a 'bright, clean green world with clear blue oceans'.[5]

If there is one area where changes we make now *will* affect the future it is in our relationship to the environment. Because environmental damage is happening gradually it's possible to ignore it. But if we ask ourselves what will happen if current trends are not reversed – holes in the ozone layer, global warming, water pollution and the accumulation of toxic and nuclear waste – then things look grim indeed. Unless you believe that technology or 'market forces' will get us out of this mess (not a wise bet), then there is no choice but to start taking the environment seriously.

Unlike most catastrophes in the making, the eventual collapse of the environment is one we can safely predict – before the suffering actually hits. But can we learn to act now for the future?

David Hicks, Director of the Global Futures Project at Bath College of Higher Education in England, is making a start. He gets his students to imagine what 'sustainability' would look like in the North, in the South and globally. And then he challenges them to think about what needs to be done to achieve it.

And there are lots of possibilities. We can start the move from fossil fuels and nuclear power to safe renewable sources of energy like solar or wind power. We can introduce an environmental cost in our economic calculations. We can start moving to a philosophy of sustainability as opposed to lemming-like economic growth at whatever cost to the environment. We can adopt an approach of responsibility and stewardship towards our planet rather than exploitation.

This may seem like pie-in-the-sky. After all, since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 most governments have shown that their actual – though unprofessed – commitment is to keeping things as they are.

And the futures research that politicians and corporations choose to use is unlikely to tell them to stop what they are doing and think about the earth. A report called *The Highly Probable Future: 83 assumptions about the year 2025*, sponsored by 18 American and European multinationals, is typically woolly on the subject of the environment. The report concludes: 'Global environmental management issues will be institutionalized in multinational corporations as well as through the United Nations and other supranational entities.' It goes on to assert: 'The multinational corporation will be the world's dominant business form.'[6]

This is not the future that many of the world's peoples want or are prepared to have decided for them. Resistance is growing everywhere. Environmental activists from Bangladesh to Brazil, from Kenya to Canada are challenging governments and corporations and gaining increasing popular support. When the Nigerian Government recently turned its guns against its own Ogoni people to make way for petroleum drilling by the Anglo-Dutch multinational Shell Oil, international protest was quickly mobilized by activists using global e-mail and other networks. And the scale of recent anti-road-building protests in Britain has taken everyone by surprise. More and more people around the globe are recognizing that we cannot 'tinker' – or build – our way out of the problems we have created for ourselves and future generations Our relationship with the planet will need to change radically.

It's now just five years to the turn of the century and a new millennium, traditionally a time of great upheaval. Astrologers are gearing up for it. The planets will be lined up in Taurus (a powerful Earth sign) in the year 2000. According to Anna, my Tarot-reader, it could mean two things: either we will embark on a new way of relating to the earth; or we will obstinately cling to our old ways. Which is it to be?

The kind of world we will have in a few decades depends on our capacity to start making big changes now. In this sense, the future is present. ■

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1 W Warren Wagar 'The Future Without End' in *Visions for the 21st Century*, ed. Sheila Moorcroft, Adamantine Press, London, 1992. **2** Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Penguin Books, London, 1995. **3** George Orwell 'James Burnham and the managerial revolution' in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1968. **4** Max Dublin *Futurehype: The Tyranny of Prophecy*, Plume Books, 1992. **5** Richard A Slaughter 'Changing images of futures in the 20th century' in *Preparing for the Future: Notes and queries for concerned educators*, ed. David Hicks, Adamantine Press, London 1994. **6** Joseph F Coates *The Highly Probable Future: 83 Assumptions about the Year 2025*, World Futures Society, Bethesda, Maryland, 1994.

The right to dream

by Eduardo Galeano

Who knows how the world will be in 2025! But one thing is certain: if we are still around, all of us will be people of the last century. However, although we cannot divine the world that will be, we can well imagine the one we would like there to be. The right to dream does not figure in the 30 human rights which the United Nations proclaimed at the end of 1948. But if it were not for this, or for the waters it gives us to drink, the other rights would die of thirst.

Allow me, readers, the madness of inventing the future. The world which is upside down dreams that it lands on its feet:

In the streets, cars will be run-over by dogs.
The air will be free of all the poisons of machines, and there will be no
other contamination than that which issues from human fear and human passions
The television set will stop being the most important member of the
family and will be treated like the ironing board or the washing machine.
The boys who don't want to do military service
will not be arrested - those who do will.
People will work to live, not live to work.
No illness will be called mortal, because life itself is mortal.
Economists will not confuse the standard of living with the level of
consumption, nor the quality of life with the quantity of things.
Historians will not believe that countries enjoy being invaded.
Politicians will not believe that the poor enjoy eating shit.
Cooks will not believe that lobsters delight in being boiled alive
Street kids will not be treated like rubbish,
because there won't be street kids.
Rich kids will not be treated like money, because there won't be rich kids.
Education will not be the privilege of those who can pay for it.
Police repression will not be the curse of those who cannot buy it.
There will be no 'legitimate' offspring and
'natural' offspring because we are all natural.
A black woman will be President of Brazil and another black woman
will be President of the United States of America. An Indian woman
will govern Guatemala; another will govern Peru. In Argentina,
the crazy women of the Plaza de Mayo will be exemplars of
mental health, because they refused to forget in times of amnesia.
The Holy Mother Church will correct a few of the Lord's mistakes. The sixth
commandment, which prohibits the pleasures of sex, will demand: 'Celebrate
the body'. The ninth, which mistrusts desire, will declare it sacred.
The Church will also dictate an eleventh commandment, which
God forgot: 'You will love Nature, to which you belong'.
The ardent man will not be a champion, and the ardent woman
will not be a whore, for no-one in the world will be turned off.

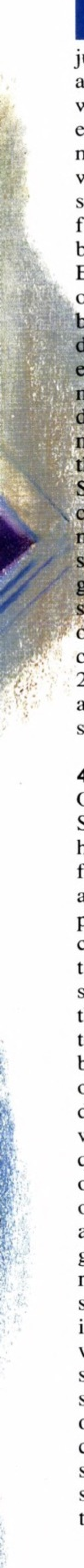
Uruguayan poet-historian **Eduardo Galeano** has written several classics including *The Open Veins of Latin America* and *Memory of Fire*

ILLUSTRATION BY COLIN ROBSON

The **Box** and I

Society is highly ordered.
But it has its rebels.
A woman's bid to make
sense of life in 2025 by Irish
writer **Evelyn Conlan**

ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH JOHN



I WOULDN'T normally think of my mother so much, but I'm having a small problem managing at the minute, so I'm going to the Therapy Box in the Library next week. I've just picked up my Box Link at the Central, and I need to do this list to key in. Last week it told me to write out what I felt every day and it will give me back a diagnosis. I'll have to take a pen and paper with me to write down what it says on the screen. I'm useless at reading through fancy rainbows, actually I can read fine but I've trouble remembering what it says. Embarrassing really, I'll probably be the only person in the building, the entire block, with a pen. I hope the screen doesn't move too fast. I didn't keep the list every day, but I should be able to recall my thoughts, if I can get the noise turned down everywhere. The box instructed me not to talk to my mother but I sort of like the old bat, so I asked her a few questions. She was born in the first half of the last century, 1949 for Christ's sake, she hates me invoking that name, being proud that she reared us beyond all that gobbledygook shit, her words. As if it matters. She says we're lucky to have a library, it's the only one in an 85-kilometre radius, she claims that they used to have them every 20 or so streets, I find it hard to imagine, all those rooms filled with untidy books, she's probably exaggerating.

4 April 2025

On Monday I telephoned my mother. She's hilariously old fashioned, she won't have a viewer machine, as she calls it, preferring not to be seen or see. She says that a conversation on the phone should be a private thing, you should be able to concentrate on the words rather than be distracted by continuous things to see. She still lives over in a 'job street', because by the time they divided us all into our quarters she had some scam worked out whereby they couldn't move her. Fearless, some of these twentieth-century people! She doesn't mind that she's the only one not working there. I find it funny visiting, quiet during the day and then an uproarious noise as all the transport units descend on the place in the evening. I prefer to be among my own, where the only place we go is to one of the centres. Our street is redbrick paved, clean, we've got a tree scheme and we don't move out much, having enough company among ourselves. We were a trial for a global village but we got sick of it. Had to key in information to our sister cities every evening, one in Egypt, one in Australia (Townsville I think it was called), Chicago, and one in Argentina somewhere. My neighbour said that we should be talking to Cork, that's when the trouble started, so we gradually let it slip. We had virtual friendships in these places and yes I suppose some of them were interesting, but we weren't allowed to talk about certain things; the screen would become a blur of XXXs for the most peculiar of reasons. Some of the people my mother's age, the ones from the last century, wanted to work out patterns of the blocking out, but the rest of us couldn't see the point, waste of energy. We were never a tired family, my mother said. Actually maybe it is still going on, maybe some of them have kept it up and who knows, maybe someone somewhere has defeated the XXXs. I doubt it. We call our block Careless, this may mean that we have few worries or it may mean that we couldn't care less, take your pick. That's the sort of thing that would get Xed on the Global, no sense of humour that machine. We have a mini-government. I went once, when I was called for duty, but frankly I hadn't my info keyed in, so I gave my vote away. My mother said that I should have sold it. I have a good relationship with her. I'll have to think of another word for that because the machine doesn't know it, it hasn't even got it in its OFF file, its Old Fashioned File. It's odd that we get on, for several reasons, but primarily because I'm paid to mind her. We opted for the 60 scheme – that means that a son or daughter takes on to mind the parent after they reach 60 and gets paid weekly out of Central Fund, they then pay for hospital or home or whatever has to happen. It's a gamble really, so of course she couldn't resist. Tomorrow is a distant century to her, something to do with crossing a millennium, leaves time less serious. The cusp of thousands banishes thoughts of pension schemes. My father's dead, of course, years ago. He both drank and smoked. He smoked five cigarettes a day, and apparently had a few pints – not one, a few – every week or so. Obscene, but there you go, he's dead. My mother clings to this peculiar notion that he wasn't a poly-addicted mess. Retrolove, I suppose. My daughter says that the 60 scheme is a rip-off, it's there only to relieve the Euorists of their responsibilities to ex-working citizens, it preys on the need for immediate Visa Credit – she has a lot in common with my mother. Before my father inflicted death on himself, he used to visit me when the children were small, everyone in their street had just lost their jobs and he used to want to get out of the neighbourhood, getting out of the house wasn't enough. He would jaunt my children on his knee, his big rough hands touching their silk skin, they seemed to like it, they tickled themselves up against him. We were a right old regular family then, would make you laugh, my husband was there too. But now that I think about it my father affected him, they discussed work day-in, day-out, and the memory of all that regularity drove my husband in search of ridiculous dreams. They all do that these last few years, they have their bags almost ready under the beds, they decide in hours, pack, and they're gone, running after work. Here, there, plane-hopping, new countries, continents, acting in strange places as if they had it all, hiding the states of their own nations inside their empty pockets. We don't move much, in fact we don't move at all, we've decided that it's too difficult with children, we stay put with the women, the old men and the few young ones who are satisfied enough.

> *Tomorrow is a distant century to her, something to do with crossing a millennium, leaves time less serious. The cusp of thousands banishes thoughts of pension schemes…*

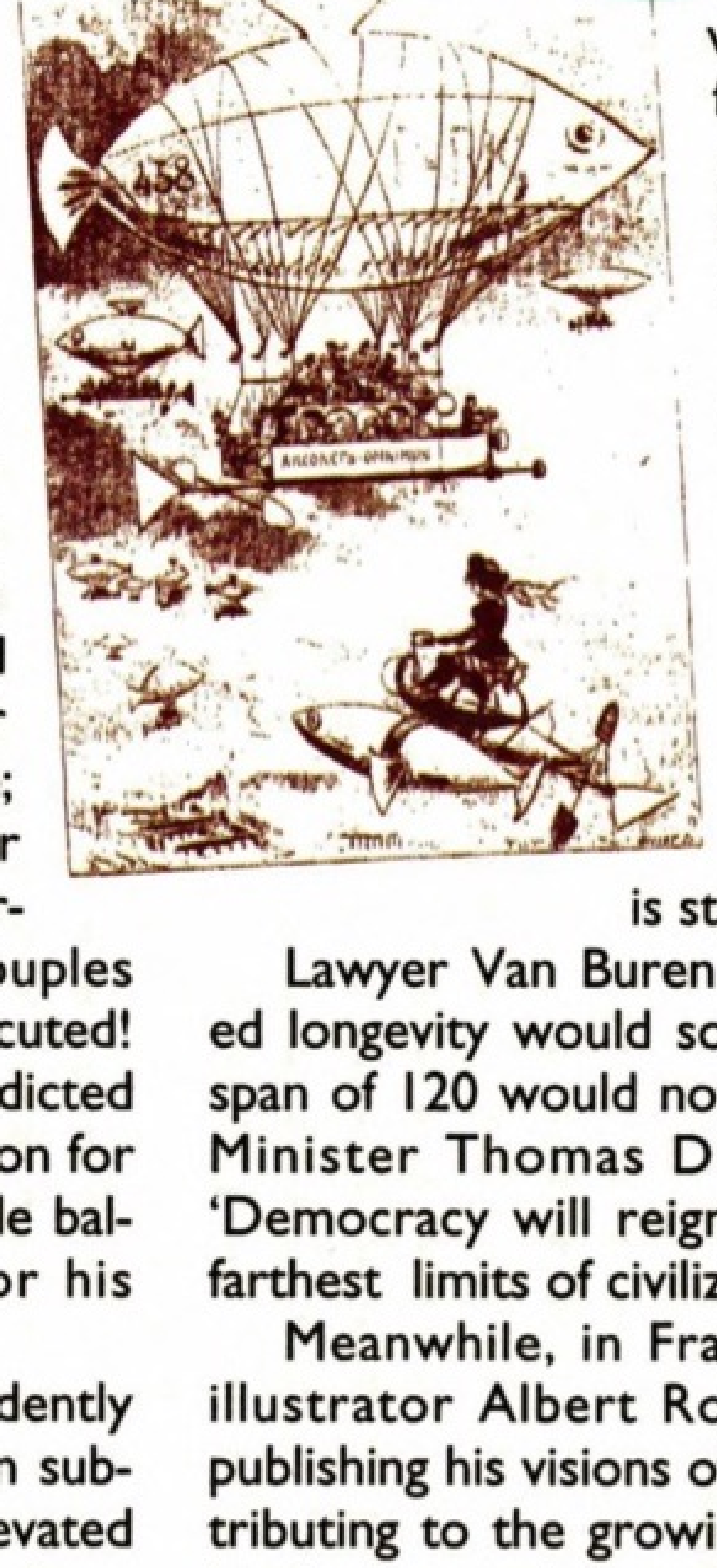
5 April 2025

I'm going in today so I'd better get this finished. Maybe there's no need, I do hate communicating with machines, I think I was born in the wrong century or else my mother has had too much influence on me, she claims that our whole lives changed over a period of only a small number of years. Because a few fellahs got carried away, loop de loo, with technology. By the time the noise level had damaged our hearing and we couldn't move ten inches without keying in somewhere, it was too late, the old systems were unrecoverable, scrapped. I think I would have preferred the privacy of that time. There's a street near us here, behind a wall, or it could be a few streets maybe, the wall travels quite a distance. We believe that there are half-human, half-robot people in there, now why they should be called 'people' rather than 'robots' I don't know, wishful thinking I suppose. Maybe though they were people first and the robot bits were added rather than the other way about. We speculate a little as to when the wall will come down but my mother says that she has no interest because as far as she's concerned the people walking about with their machines are robots already. She's sharp, acidy, she has seen real war, dead bodies, blood on the ground, they always fell she says. Wars now are clean, all zap on screens and we're not allowed to see anything below twenty metres from the ground. She says that we could use our imaginations if we weren't so lazy, but it's not encouraged, and I guess we do tire easily and it's better not to know anyway. There's a shadow to my mother's sorrow when she talks of war. Oh dear, now I'll have to key the central question, what do you think your problem is? Ahh, yes. I have two children, a son and a daughter, I did the 'Choose Sex' one, but I don't admit that when asked, because a woman always has to justify her choice if she owns up to making one. Also, people think I'm more interesting if they think that I trusted or gambled on ordinary fate. I like to be thought interesting. I did do both choices because I liked the notion of variety, had still a streak of anarchy in my programme. But my children are strange, and are drawing attention to our street, our house, people have begun to look, I see blue lights flashing on the ceiling when I go to bed. Not that my neighbours won't be helpful, we have a secret called friendship, we help each other with touches and smiles. We're all soothing the Walshes now because since they've speeded up the time on death row and dropped the last appeals, too expensive, it looks as if they'll lose two sons very soon. For selling cigarettes. But I hate to think of the extra attention my neighbours will have to suffer because of my son and daughter. All for history and a song. My daughter, who has spent all her life asking questions – 'researching' she calls it in her old-fashioned way – is trying to think of a thing, any old thing, in the Socialist Calendar, so she can have a centenary this year. I know what that will mean. She says that instead of getting people to write bad poems before they qualify for money, they should be taught history, and they should join together and have meetings, off camera, about old movements, revolutions and fads like that, about how to get real information as she calls it. I forget why she wants the meetings held off camera. My mother of course thinks that's great, she says that we didn't just kill conversation, we gave it away. And my son, do you know what he spends his time doing? Learning old songs! He sits with his grandmother and she sings all the big ones that her father taught her, some of them in Irish for God's sake. He travels around the country getting other people to do the same. I ask you, where will it all end, where did I go wrong? What will become of them? Where will the touch of a question that surrounds both their bodies get them? So, what will I tell the machine the problem is? I will say it is that I seem to be born in the middle ages. I am in the middle of mother's and my children's time. I do not seem to have lived a life at all. She's from an exact time, they have settled into theirs, but I'm lost between them. Was it always thus, I will ask. When I die I hope to be stuffed and put in the middle of a fountain; I like water. I've put this on my death arrangement file at the Centre. My mother now, is not choosing euthanasia at all, but that would be her. ■

Not that my neighbours won't be helpful, we have a secret called friendship, we help each other with touches and smiles.

Evelyn Conlan is a short-story writer and novelist, born in rural Ireland in 1952. She now lives in Dublin. Her book titles include *My Head in Opening* (Attic), *Stars in the Daytime* (The Women's Press), *Taking Scarlet as a Real Colour* (Blackstaff Press) and she has just completed another novel and play on the lives of Henri and Sophie Gaudier-Brzeska. She has sporadic bursts of political involvement and then retreats gratefully into fiction. Almost a Luddite.

How wrong can you be?



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Very – when it comes to trying to forecast the future.

In the early 1890s a US news agency commissioned 74 prominent citizens to write brief essays on what life would be like in 1993. If the 1893 forecasters had been right the workday would now last only three hours; transcontinental mail would be transmitted in pneumatic tubes; laws would be so simplified that there would be no work for lawyers; all forests would have gone; there would be state-run colleges for servants; and, most bizarre of all, marriages would be happy because couples unsuited to each other would be executed!

Chicago Senator John J Ingalls predicted that by the 1990s 'It will be as common for the citizen to call for his (sic) dirigible balloon as it is now for his buggy or his boots'.

Journalist Walter Wellman confidently predicted that there was no future in subway trains and travel would be by elevated trains moving along glass-enclosed tracks.

None of the forecasters anticipated the automobile which was to revolutionize travel in the decades just ahead. This was in spite of the fact that gasoline-powered cars were successfully run in Germany in the 1880s. One forecaster was certain, however, that the 1993 traveller would be able to ride by rail all the way from Chicago to Buenos Aires – something which is still not possible.

Lawyer Van Buren Demnslow predicted longevity would so increase that a life span of 120 would not be unusual. Baptist Minister Thomas Dixon Jnr declared: 'Democracy will reign triumphant to the farthest limits of civilization.'

Meanwhile, in France, journalist and illustrator Albert Robida was regularly publishing his visions of the future and contributing to the growing popularity of this kind of speculation. He had some quite accurate foresights – the television, for example. But he also depicted airborne hotels as a solution to overcrowding in holiday resorts and saw the Egyptian Sphinx in the middle of a lush garden thanks to a gigantic engineering project to control the climate.

In 1922 Swiss architect Le Corbusier proposed a city in which airplanes were the answer to traffic congestion. In the 1930s machines that were half-car and half-aircraft were built and communities were prepared to build 'air parks'. According to one wartime survey, one out of every three car dealers also planned to sell aircraft after World War Two.

Ironically, some more fanciful fiction writers have come closer to the mark than their more 'realistic' counterparts in the worlds of business, politics and journalism. HG Wells, for example, foresaw nuclear power, Aldous Huxley genetic engineering.

Perhaps the safest forecast we can make for the year 2025 is that it won't be like whatever we think it will be like.

We trust that examples from this issue of **NI** will find their deserved place in a similar article in 2025. ■

Sources: *The Futurist*, May/June 1993. *Today Then: America's best minds look 100 years into the future on the occasion of the 1893 World Columbian Exposition* compiled by Dave Walter, American and World Geographic Publishing 1993.

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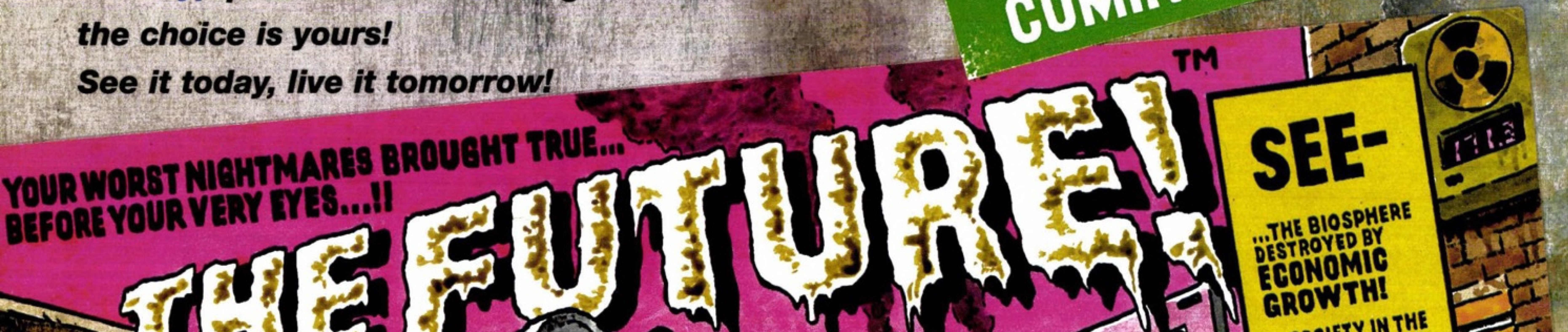
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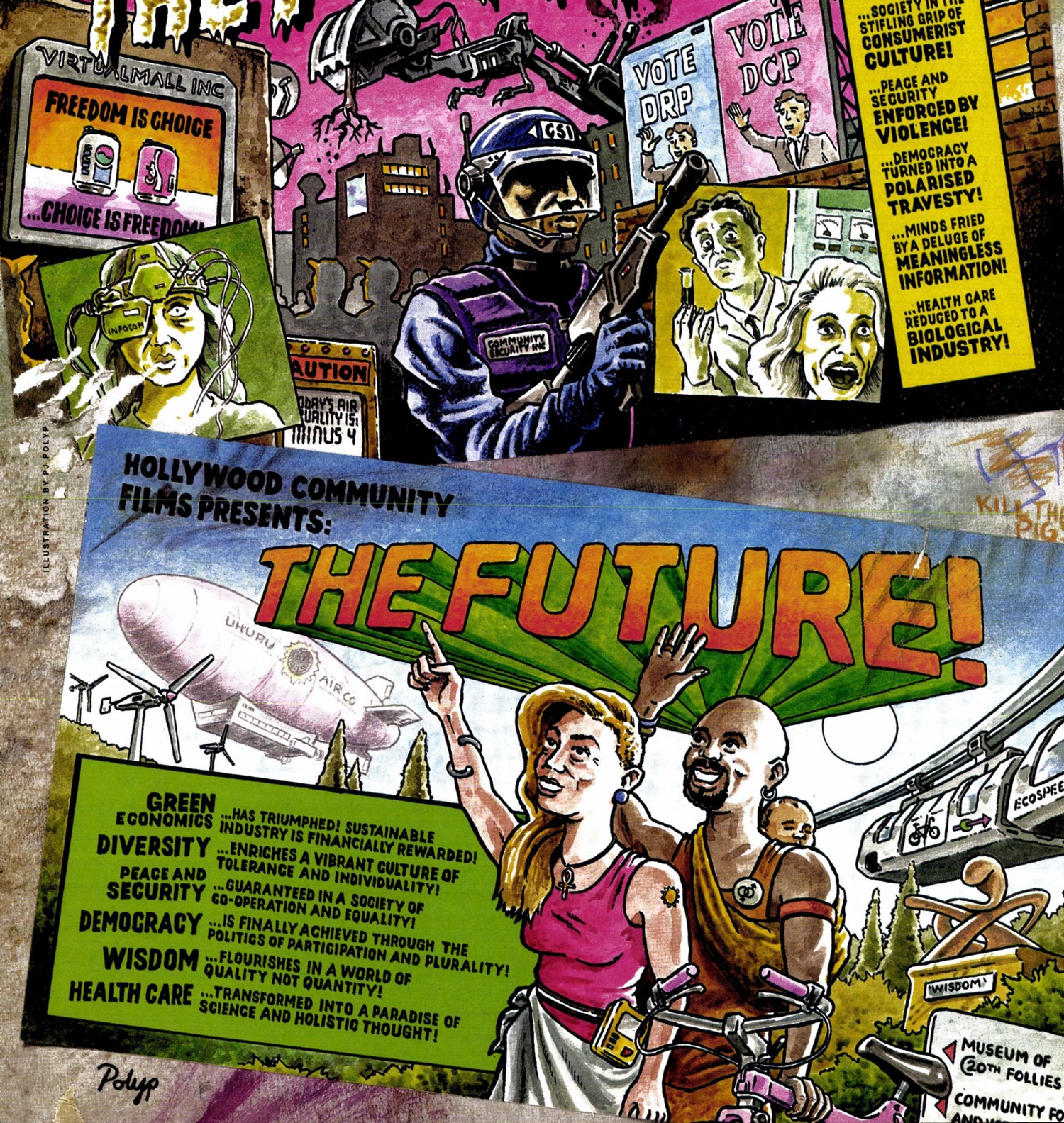
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WISDOM ...FLOURISHES IN A WORLD OF QUALITY NOT QUANTITY!
HEALTH CARE ...TRANSFORMED INTO A PARADISE OF SCIENCE AND HOLISTIC THOUGHT!
UHURU AIRCO
ECOSPEE
WISDOM
MUSEUM OF 20TH FOLLIES
COMMUNITY FO
KILL THE PIGS
Polyp

The Future Imperfect

Tense times for history student Elijah 'Bunny' Mikimoto. **Manjula Padmanabhan** describes what happens when he tries to challenge the orthodoxies of the 2020s.

OUTSIDE, the palm trees bent and snapped in a blizzard of pale green snow. Inside, Prof Saraswati Ali was warming to her point. 'He's not a bad student,' she was saying to her colleagues, Professors Zuleikha O'Brien and Christine Krishnaswamy. 'But his thesis on late Twentieth-Century Fundamentalism is what I would call deranged.'

'Surely that's not reason enough to consider flogging him?' asked Prof Zuleikha. 'I had the impression that he was rather too cuddly for that!' It was well known that she had a weakness for her male students. There had been several complaints, but the University had always managed to hush them up.

The indicator on the entrance module purred. 'Well, here he is now,' said Prof Christine, sucking on her substance simulator, currently set on 'coke'. Sure enough, three seconds later, Elijah 'Bunny' Mikimoto stepped out.

He was short but well-muscled. He held his thesis shyly across his pelvic region. He wore natural plastic tights, ski boots and a moon-beam collar. His entire upper body was encased in a hologram of dense tattoos which gave him the appearance of being both chic and deeply vulnerable. He had electrolyzed his hair to give himself a fashionably mature bald pate. And his beard was maintained at precisely five o'clock-shadow length.

'It's your central idea, I'm afraid,' began Prof Saraswati. 'This ridiculous notion that there are fundamentalists amongst us today! And that they are no different from the religious fundamentalists of the previous century...'

'I beg to disagree, M'lady Professor,' said Bunny, in his endearingly masculine whisper. 'My argument suggests that the fundamentalists of our era are even more dangerous than those of the past, for being apparently invisible to us.'

> *'But a well-dressed man is an ornament to his society,' said Prof Zuleikha breathily.*

There was a pained silence.

Prof Zuleikha, taking pity on the boy said, 'Come now, my sweet, you can't possibly defend that little idea?'

'I believe I can,' said Bunny. 'I believe that today's fundamentalists oppress millions of people through the media and the market...'

'Blasphemy!' snapped Prof Saraswati

'...the fashion industry, for instance,' continued Bunny, 'ruthlessly eliminates all those who do not conform to its dress codes.' He looked down at himself, gesturing with the regulation cigarette in his hand. 'My hologram has to be updated every week if I want to avoid being lynched!'

'But a well-dressed man is an ornament to his society,' said Prof Zuleikha breathily. These young things were so sweet! So charmingly rebellious. 'You should consider it your privilege to uphold the standards of this progressive age!'

Prof Christine leant forward on her ornamental bone-china crutch: 'Consider the dietary restrictions of the past,' she growled. Her subject was Classical Vegetarianism. 'Pork for some, beef for others, dog for all except the Chinese...'

Bunny took a deep breath. 'And today we need special permits from the meat industry if we want carrots with our tiger stew! Today we're forced to eat rattlesnake ratatouille and platypus omelettes because we can no longer share the planet with creatures we don't eat!' He looked defiantly up at the three towering women. 'The mullahs of yesterday are the multinational moguls of today!'

All three academics snorted. 'Sheer guano, sweetie!' said Prof Zuleikha. 'Don't they teach you anything? The slogan of the traditional world was "Annihilation is better than cure". Whereas today no-one is killed except by their own non-conformity!'

Prof Saraswati reached for her ayurvedic suppositories. As the president of the Enema League, she had led the campaign to bring bowel functions out of the toilet and into the drawing room. 'And of course,' she said, 'the ancient Hindu strategy of erasing fundamentalism by denying its existence has guaranteed a free and fair society.' Inserting the suppository through a cunningly devised slit in her tartan sarong, she continued: 'Look at our University! We're open to all customs, all ages, all diets, all genders, all perversions, all disabilities. Our students are chosen for their mixed ancestry and our courses for their lack of cultural context.'

Bunny said, 'Isn't that a problem too, M'lady Professor? Isn't there something amiss with the Theory of Mandatory Liberalism? Doesn't it lead to the oppression of those who don't wish to be liberals?'

'Pah!' exploded Prof Christine. 'You're a Closet Terrorist, that's what you are!' she exclaimed. 'Behind that obsequious male exterior there's a sneaking, snivelling traditionalist, just dying to run back to the bad old days when Right was Right and Wrong was Wrong!' She poked him with her crutch. 'You need to have a little sense twisted into you! The rack in the Psychopathology Lab would do you a world of good. You don't realize how fortunate you are to be living in this permissive era. In the twentieth century you, a man, could never enjoy the sacred privilege of bearing children. Today, through the omniscient grace of biotechnology even the lowly masculine abdomen can be fashioned into a receptacle for the Divine Catheter!'

Prof Zuleikha was beginning to squirm. She always did, as the time for her quinturnal copulation approached. She realized she would have no choice but to force herself on Bunny. 'Excuse me,' she said, tapping him lightly on the shoulder with her obedience prod. 'If you would just come this way...' He followed her, his eyes glassy, to the couch.

The other two professors indulged their separate fixations while watching the weather

outside the window turn abruptly tropical. 'In his thesis,' said Prof Saraswati presently, 'he makes absurd comparisons between the vile caste system of ancient India and the sacred genetic classification of today!' She wiped herself delicately with personal hygiene tissues hand made from the skins of rare Indonesian lizards. They were believed to be beneficial for several lifetimes ahead. 'He suggests that our chromosomal typing is cruel and unnatural.'

Prof Christine gurgled slightly. She had to set her simulator back to neutral before she could speak. 'Well, it's hard to understand any of it,' she said. 'My domestic help was born with the dentition and DNA of a thoroughbred manservant. And yet? For the first fifteen years of his life, his parents steadfastly refused to send him to a Jeevesary, insisting that his IQ suited him to a career in bonsai gardening! Mutants, I tell you! They're all around us...'

Prof Zuleikha rejoined them, panting slightly. 'Did someone mention mutants?' she asked. 'I heard on the Telenet this morning that a community of them had been discovered living in the mangrove swamps on The Fringe.' The Fringe was the name for the boundary of the climate-controlled zone. 'I can't understand why they haven't been caught and reconditioned yet. This modern squeamishness about behavior-modulation is ridiculous! Without it, our men would still be uncontrollable brutes.'

Bunny joined them, looking subdued. His willpower was returning to normal and with it, his natural modesty and sense of shame. 'Excuse me, M'lady Professors,' he said in his soft voice. 'I want to protest this recent event! I had thought that at least in the chambers of my esteemed professors I would be safe from an obedience-prod attack!'

Prof Christine trained her brilliant pink eyes on him. 'As you are surely aware, young man, Professor Zuleikha belongs to the Holy Order of Hedonists for Peace. It is her sacred duty to perform the reproductory rite five times a day. She certainly finds it more inconvenient than you did just now, but you don't find her complaining or shirking her duties.' The strong sunlight outside was bruising her transparent skin and she turned to move inward.

At this moment, Bunny struck. Whipping out the canister of FemOff he had concealed in his back pocket, he sprayed the room with the concentrated odour of a thousand unbathed, male, American football players just after a game. All three women slipped to the floor, unconscious. Using the telenet unit on Prof Saraswati's wrist, he entered the code for the Resistance headquarters. 'Mission accomplished,' he reported, 'the vixens sleep. Begin transmission of reverse-conditioning program...'

A volley of enthusiastic clicks and twitters issued from the unit. Too late Bunny remembered that in recognition of !Kung Appreciation Day all communication was to be in that language. Paralysed with the indecisiveness bred into his sex, he dithered just long enough for the effects of the odour to wear off. He was led away, bravely singing Rugby songs, by a crack team of commando grannies.

Restored to dignity, the three professors congratulated themselves upon their narrow escape.

'Well, it was all for the best,' said Prof Christine. 'He was caught young enough to qualify for a sex change and maternity. In a year he'll just be another balloon-bellied noviciate at the Breeding Central.'

'Or I could have him lobotomized and trained as an erotic assistant,' murmured Prof Zuleikha dreamily, 'on compassionate grounds of course. He was a menace to himself.'

'Who are you talking about?' said Prof Saraswati. She had just finished vaporizing Bunny's thesis.

'No-one,' said Prof Christine, as she watched the mid-morning narcissi unfurl their petals in fast forward mode, outside the window. ■

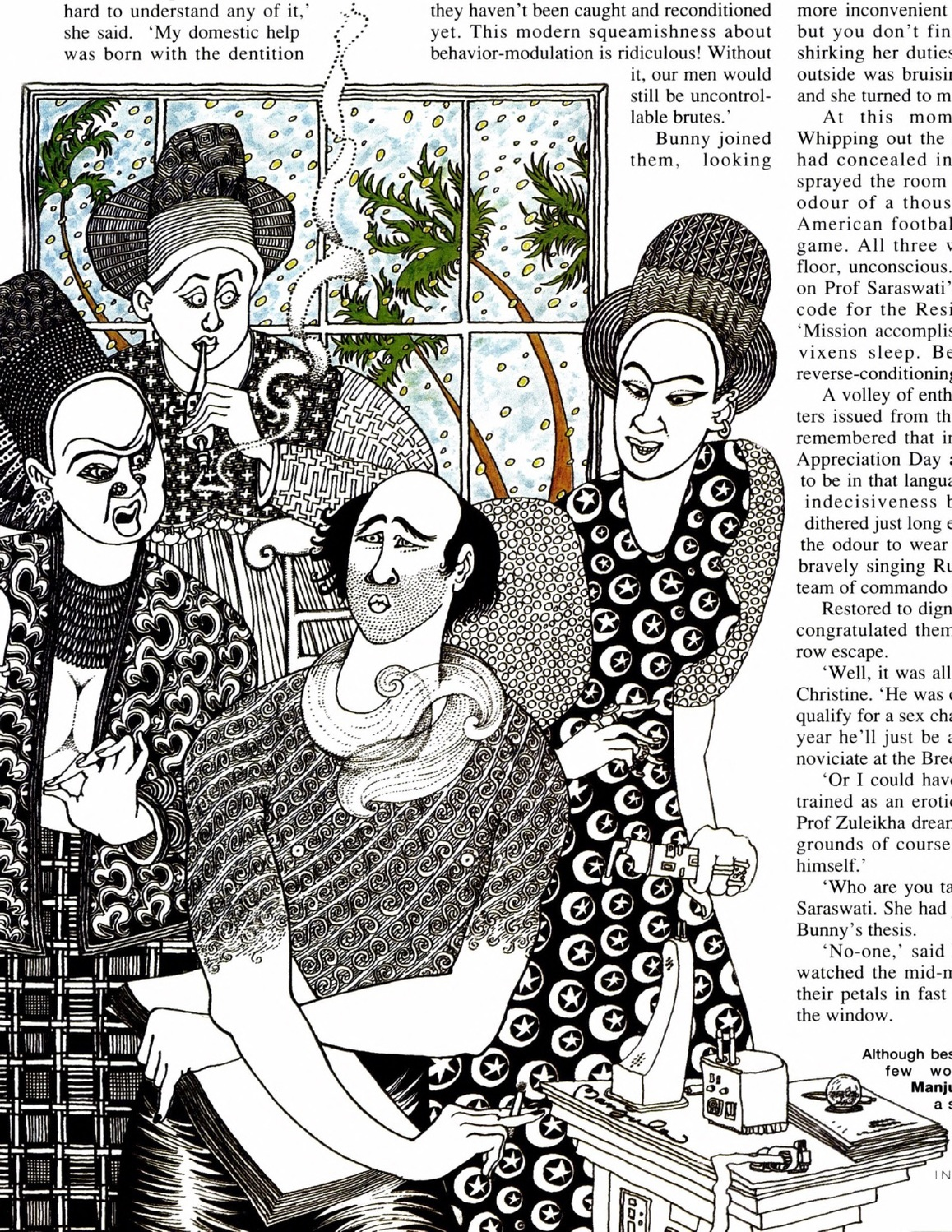


ILLUSTRATION BY MANJULA PADMANABHAN

Although best known as one of India's few women strip-cartoonists, **Manjula Padmanabhan** is also a short-story writer. She lives in Delhi.

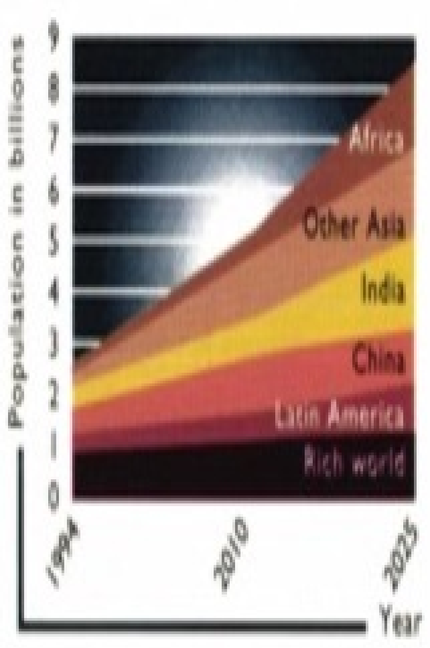
THE FUTURE

What will the world be like in the year 2025?
Here is what *may* happen if we follow current trends.

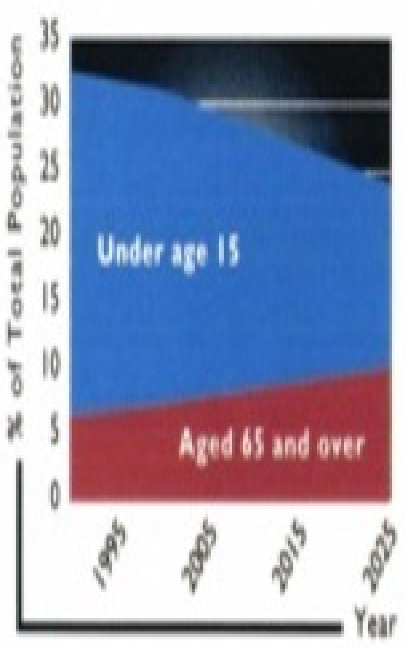
PEOPLE

- The world's population is projected to increase from 5.7 billion in 1994 to 8.2 billion in 2025.[1]

Projections by region



Changes in age structure



- Population and plant growth

In 1995 humankind is co-opting 40% of plant growth each year, leaving 60% for all other species.

In 40 years a doubling of human numbers would theoretically mean only 20% available for other creatures.[2]

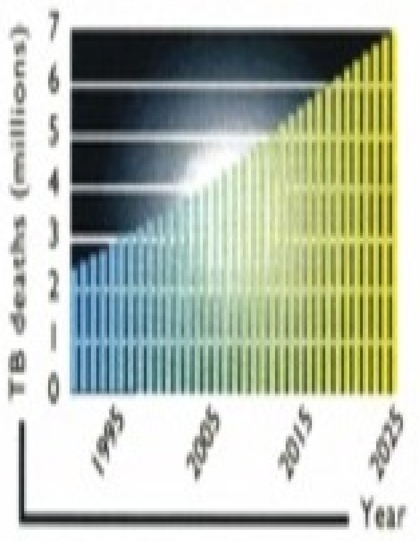
- Africa's sub-Saharan population is expected to increase from 500 million to 1.2 billion by 2020 while the region's ability to support its people is expected to continue declining.[2]

NI predicts... ***Economic and environmental pressure to migrate northwards combined with HIV/AIDS infection will slow down the rate of population growth in the South. The Northern 'fortress mentality' will intensify – until the ageing populations of the North realize the benefits of letting in young migrants from the South.***

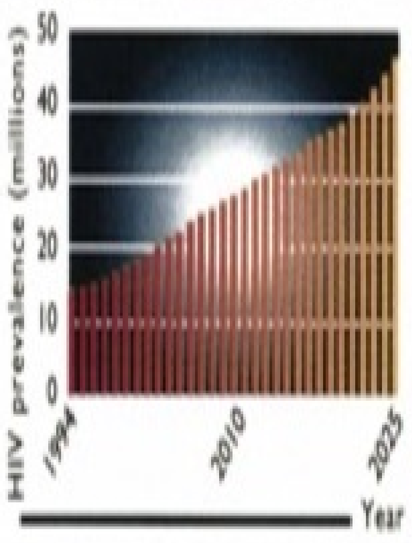
HEALTH

- Polio, leprosy, guinea worm will be eradicated by the year 2025 - and measles will have been eliminated as a public health problem.[3]
- If current trends persist tuberculosis (TB) and AIDS/HIV will be major scourges.

If projected world figures for TB deaths in 2005[3] are extended to 2025, this is what happens:



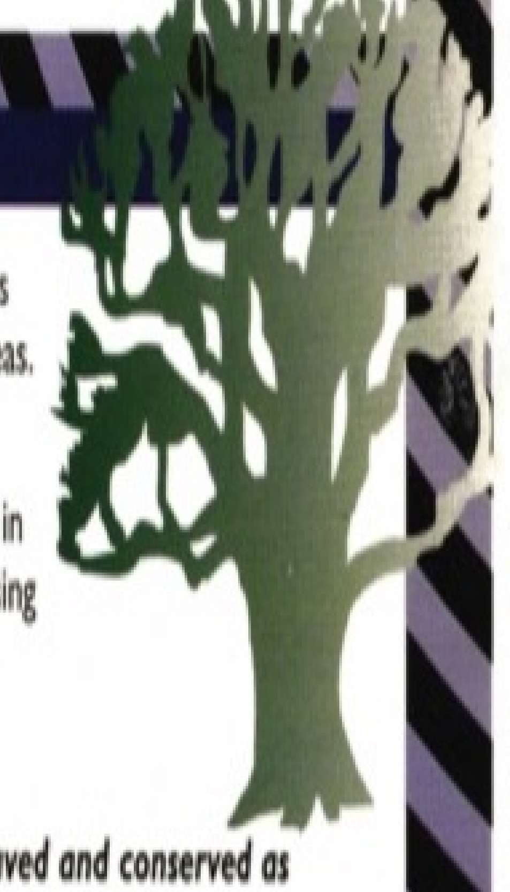
If projected world figures for HIV-infected adults alive in the year 2000 are extended to 2025, this is what happens:



- Using biotechnology, all human ailments that have a genetic link will be identified and mapped by 2025.

NI predicts... ***Health will be a top political issue as the links between environment and ill-health become unavoidably obvious and as populations suffer the delayed effects of their forbears' nuclear policies and toxic waste creation. Alternative therapies will displace the global dominance of the Western medical model.***

BIODIVERSITY



- Tropical forests are being destroyed so fast that in 25 years they may have disappeared, except in the most remote areas. The Himalayan forest is expected to be gone by 2015.[2]
- Between 70 and 95% of the Earth's species are contained in the world's disappearing tropical forests. Today we are losing 50 species a day. By 2020, 10 million species are likely to become extinct.[2]

NI predicts... ***Small sections of rainforest may be saved and conserved as tourist attractions or areas of scientific interest. The green movement will become more militant and more varied in its approach. Information technology will be used to organize resistance more effectively and to sabotage damaging projects.***

ECONOMICS

1995 MEGATRENDS

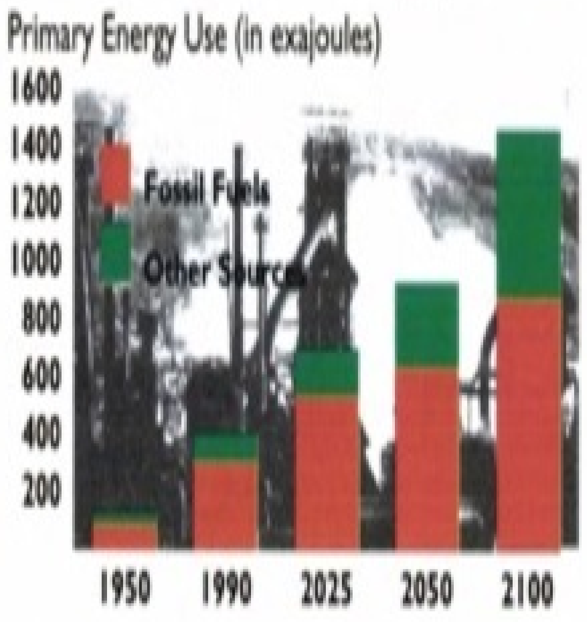
- The gap between rich and poor is widening: the rich in the 'rich world' are richer and the poor in the 'poor world' are poorer than they were in 1970.[2] Unemployment is growing worldwide.
- North America and Northern Europe have the richest countries in the world, but East Asia has more vibrant economies. The economies of the former Eastern bloc have collapsed and Germany is carrying the cost of re-unification. The poorest countries in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa.[4]
- The power of multinational corporations continues to grow. The top ten multinational corporations have combined annual sales of $850 billion – five times greater than the GNPs of sub-Saharan Africa excluding South Africa.[2]

NI predicts... ***China will be the world's largest economy, surpassing the US and Japan. The economies of Argentina, Hungary and Malaysia may be vibrant, but sub-Saharan Africa will still be struggling.[6] The Information Revolution will have established information as a leading resource. New work patterns – fewer working hours combined with information technology – will have made the workplace more open to women, people living in remote areas and disabled people.***

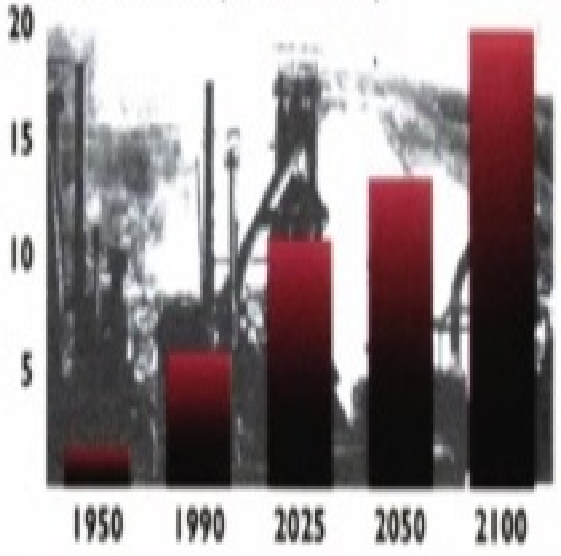
ENERGY

If we continue current energy policies this is what will happen:

Primary Energy Use (in exajoules)

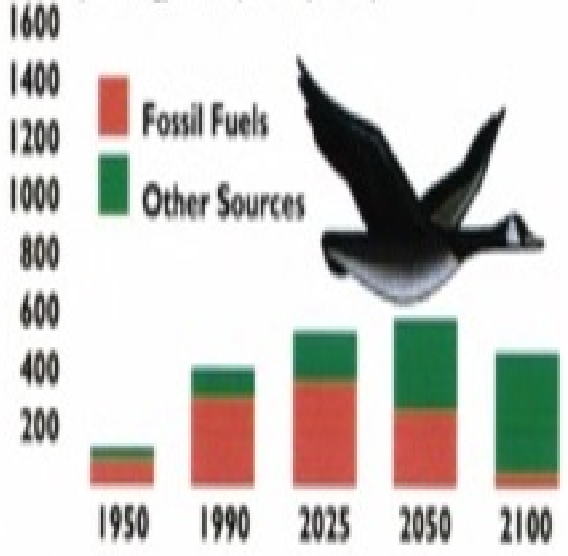


Carbon Emissions (in billion tons)

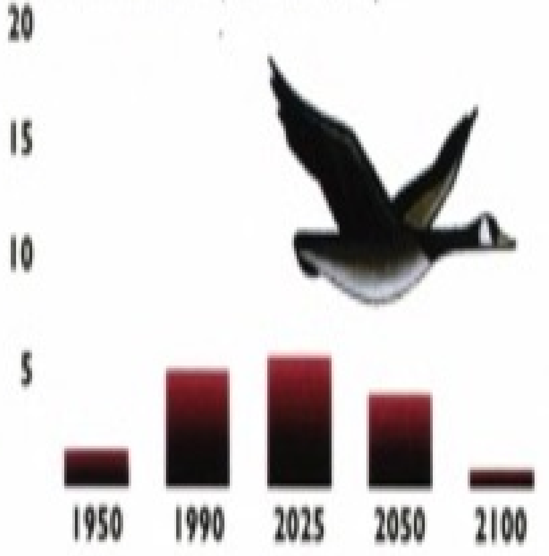


If we radically change energy policies this is what could happen:

Primary Energy Use (in exajoules)



Carbon Emissions (in billion tons)



Sustainable future: To achieve this by 2025 the world needs to:

- Reduce coal use by 73%
- Reduce oil use by 20%
- Phase out nuclear power
- Use wind and solar energy as primary source[5]

NI predicts... ***Energy will be a huge political issue, with vested interests fighting to push their favoured energy path. Green politics will play a leading role, gaining strength and influence worldwide. Renewable energy sources – solar and wind power – could emerge as major assets of the South which may develop these new paths at a faster rate than more industrialized nations.***

CLIMATE

- Greenhouse-gas emissions cause global warming and pose a serious threat to life on earth. To stabilize emissions of these gases in the atmosphere industrial nations will have to reduce their fossil fuel burning by 20% by 2002, 50 % by 2015 and 75% by 2030.[5]
- By the mid-2000s the average global temperature is predicted to rise by an estimated 3-5°C. A 4°C average temperature drop was enough to trigger the onset of the ice age. While the tropics are likely to see little increase, the temperate zones may witness a rise of 5-7 °C and the poles 6-12° C.[2]
- Sea levels will rise. Coastal megacities like Shanghai, Calcutta and Lagos will start to disappear – as will London, Tokyo, New York and Rotterdam. Entire regions and some nations will be at risk of submersion. Combined drought and flooding may trigger an exodus of 400 million environmental refugees.[2]

NI predicts... ***Western governments will start taking real steps to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases when cancers in their own countries and rising sea levels produce widespread public concern and pressure for change. An industrial pollution tax will be seen as a way of paying for environmental repair work – with credit initiatives for clean businesses.***

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

1995 MEGATRENDS

- Green politics, feminism and community-based politics are growing forces.
- So are the reactionary forces of fascism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism.
- Most conflicts in the world are civil wars – dominated by militarism and chauvinism.
- There's growing pressure for the United Nations to reform and play a more active and democratic role in peace-keeping and world leadership.

NI predicts... ***By 2025 a reformed and strengthened United Nations will increase prospects for world governance and peace-keeping, while the US plays a smaller role in international affairs. The US may revert to its Cold War mentality – this time in relation to China. Environmental crises will strengthen the case for sustainability – as opposed to economic growth and consumerism – as the dominant philosophy.***

ILLUSTRATION: JAMES MARSH / ARTBANK

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1 *The State of World Population 1994*, UNFPA (New York). 2 *The Gaia Atlas of Future Worlds*, Norman Myers (Gaia 1990). 3 World Health Organisation, Geneva 1995. 4 *Human Development Report 1994*, UNDP (OUP, Oxford and New York). 5 *Power Surge*, Christopher Flavin and Nicholas Lenssen (Earthscan, London, 1995). 6 *The World in 2020*, Hamish McRae (Harper Collins, London 1995).

Ec

An osterian conundrum

Kirkpatrick Sale unearths a missive from the future.

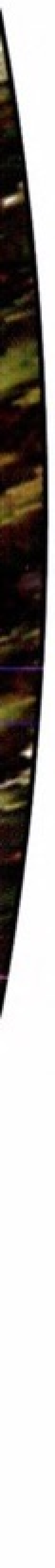


ILLUSTRATION BY CARL CONWAY

The following pages of a hand-written diary were found a few weeks ago in a desk in a large mansion 40 miles north of New York City, under circumstances which remain a mystery ...

21 MARCH 2025

This day, the day on which Saint Benedict expired, seems an appropriate day on which to begin this diary. I won't say he was an inspiration for us, except in the most mediated sense, but he was one of those whose example taught us the virtues of the communitarian life of devotion. That our devotion is to Gaia and not to God, and our community more egalitarian and diverse than anything he ever knew, does not diminish the kind of model for our work those early Christian monestarians provided.

In any case, I am setting down this story for reasons more terrestrial than divine. For although this community, one of the Gaian-centered ecosteries set up at the very end of the last century, was able to survive the Ecotastrophe it is now in the midst of another crisis. I feel I must tell something about the turmoil we are now going through for the benefit of those who will continue to live here as well as for any who may see these words in the future.

I am guided in this by the incontestable truth that the Ecotastrophe at last made clear: the industrial way of life brought to its perfection by the high-tech corporations and their subservient nation-states over the last few decades is nothing but a way of death, certain to end with the destruction of great numbers of surface species and systems. If the Ecotastrophe taught us nothing else, it surely taught us that – right into the marrow of our bones.

31 MARCH 2025

I must explain the Ecotastrophe.

First of all, it wasn't one thing so much as an accumulation of all the multiple perils inherent in industrial civilization. The reckless devotion to industrialism produced chemicals that were pumped into the environment, that in turn produced the ever-enlarging ozone holes. From there came the ultra-violet radiation that killed off fragile species, destroyed forest and sea ecosystems, and allowed new viruses to flourish where those systems had been damaged.

The same devotion produced carbon pollution which in turn accelerated global warming. Inevitably, the ocean began to rise – about two feet by 2015. This destroyed coastal and inland systems worldwide, and made the tinderboxes that burst into a series of megafires for a decade. And so on. Industrialism, unable to stop itself, created the conditions for its self-destruction – just as those of us in the Ecosterian movement always said it would.

It all came to a head in the middle of 2020 with the first of the great die-offs, in Australia. That was when we realized that our environmental assaults had tipped the delicate oxygen-carbon balance that had allowed aerobic species like ours to flourish on the earth for more than three billion years. Great areas of the mesosphere were so carbon-heavy that human life below them could not continue. It was worst in the ozone-depleted areas, but global warming, the decline in the oxygen-producing capacity of disturbed ocean and forest ecosystems, and the terrible oxygen-depleting megafires indicated that it would soon affect most places on earth.

The toll was catastrophic. In less than a month all surface life in Australia was done for, New Zealand followed quickly, then Indonesia and the few Melanesian islands that hadn't been flooded. The main Asian continent remained relatively unaffected for nearly a year.

Then, at the beginning of 2021, a world-wide ban on automobile use was introduced. The United Nations Army was stretched to the limit, yet it effectively monitored the ban everywhere but China. There was an embargo on all coal and oil shipments similarly enforced by UN might. But of course the horse had long bolted by then. The next big die-off came in southern Africa in March of 2021. A few months later a huge oxygen hole appeared over South America.

The global North, which had been pretty smug up until then (the North American Coalition even closed its borders against the hordes trying to escape from the South) suddenly began to suffer. Northern Russia, Scandinavia, Britain and Canada were particularly affected. By the next summer, oxygen holes were presumed to exist in every region of the globe and uncountable numbers of every aerobic species were dead and dying. I say 'presumed' because there were no reliable sources of information since the global news systems had collapsed along with other systems. In those few places where human life survived the only news came from a few straggling travelers.

But there were – there are – survivors. Much to the surprise of the scientists, there were some localized spots, mostly in the North and mostly away from industrial centers, that were able to resist the onslaught. These were mainly wetland areas with low population densities, high vegetation densities, no fossil fuels and self-sufficient agriculture.

It came as no surprise to us at the Hudson Ecostery, or to anyone else in the Ecosterian movement. For the last 30 years we have been preaching the Gaian message that the only way for humans to survive on earth was to give up the industrial world, isolate themselves in small self-sufficient communities devoted to ecological restoration and to get off the carbon teats of industrialism. We had to learn the ways of simple living and environmental harmony – and beg Gaia for forgiveness.

And so in these last three years the collapse of industrial civilization has actually meant very little to us, has not really changed our lifestyles much except that we no longer get global or even much inter-ecosterian news. Some of us don't mind at all; I call the Ecotastrophe the 'Freedom From Information Act'. We have gone on within our enclave, working hard to keep all its systems and species functioning despite the devastation outside.

Until the crisis that now so roils us. That has changed everything.

7 APRIL 2025

I see that sentence now – the one with which I ended the last entry – and my pulse races.

Our current crisis started just about a year ago, when we made the first tentative moves to assess conditions in the immediately surrounding bioregion. Our atmospheric readings suggested that oxygen depletion seemed to have peaked sometime in mid-2023 and there was now oxygen in the area just beyond our forest. One or two brave types made forays out. Breathing conditions were found to be tolerable, at least until the heat of the summer. And so this winter and spring a good deal of exploration has gone on.

It was a few weeks ago, on 20 March, that Jack Cassian, one of our most veteran ecosterians, found the remains of a gas station a few miles away. Slightly exposed in the ground behind it were three huge tanks of gasoline with their fuel still in them, miraculously unexploded. He announced the news at dinner that night:

'Ecosterians, I am bound to tell you of a discovery I made Outside today that I think will prove momentous for our little community. I have located a source of gasoline that just might provide an answer to a lot of the problems that have been nagging us.'

He held up a hand. 'Now I know that a lot of you are going to start complaining. But please. I have given this a lot of thought. I want you to do the same. It won't be hard to find a generator somewhere, or make one out of odd parts. With that much gasoline we could supply electricity here for at least two or three years on a modest scale. We could have electricity for lights on the main perimeter entrances and be able to spot any intruders, like the wild man who broke in last month – and believe me, there'll be more of them as the air improves. We could use it for some of the cooking so we wouldn't have to use up so much precious wood – particularly since the Outside forests are likely to take maybe 10 to 20 years to regenerate. We could even use it for lights in the labs and library at night so we don't have to go blind with those damn candles and don't risk another fire like the one that damaged the music collection.'

I was groaning out loud at this point. All this was complete heresy, an absolute travesty of all that Gaianism and Ecosterianism stood for – and Jack knew it full well.

He went on: 'Oh, I know that some of you, you purists, think that what I'm saying is out of bounds because it means using fossil fuels and we all know what happened when they were used on a massive scale. But I'm just talking about a little gasoline generator, for Gaia's sake! That's not going to have any effect on our air here or the atmosphere around us. It will do no harm – and look at all the benefits it would bring. I can't think of any reason except some kind of pious old-fogeyism to deny ourselves these improvements.'

ILLUSTRATION BY CARL CONWAY

Well, uproar followed and went on for nearly three hours before we broke for the night. And it has been just as heated in the two weeks since. I needn't go into the details – I can't bear to. But as I took pains to point out several times in our discussions, for us to adopt Jack Cassian's plan would mean not only abandoning the principles of our community but would also very likely restore industrial culture here and give it a base from which it could spread out and condemn the world again.

Our principles are important in themselves: that we use only renewable fuels in our lives so as not to deplete the stock of the living earth's living treasures; that we live simply so that all other species may simply live; that we live in accordance with the rhythms of nature, and make only minimal use of artificial light and heat; and that we do not use technologies that do violence to the earth – of which petroleum ones are the most heinous – on any scale at any time under any conditions.

But beyond this, adoption of electricity would mean that we were knowingly headed down that slippery slope of industrial thinking that had led to the Ecotastrophe. The kind of thinking that says that 'if a thing can be done it should be' and 'if it's easier it's better'.

I was astonished to find that there were people who tended to side with Jack's madness. Not the older generation, not the founding parents of 1997 and the early joiners. But many people who had been with us a long time and should have known better. One woman, Liana Campana, who had been an ecosterian for a couple of decades at least, said she was troubled but felt that the security of the community would be improved by electricity at the entryways. As the mother of a six-year-old she didn't want to take chances with any more dangerous intruders. A younger man, who went by the name of Snake – it was the fashion for newcomers to take animal names after their vision quests – argued that we were exactly the kind of community that could be trusted with technology from the old days. We would use it wisely and not let it get out of hand, as non-ecosterians might if they got hold of that gasoline.

So the argument has raged – much to my astonishment, since I had thought Jack's idea so preposterous. Tonight it gets put to a vote. I wish I were sure we would win. I am not. I don't know what's come over so many people, why the idea of technical ease and power can be so seductive to them, why they should be so willing to compromise – no, abandon – the ideas by which they've lived for so long. But that is why I began these notes, so that future generations can prepare themselves for these kinds of controversies.

Whichever way it goes, this vote will change our community for years to come. I will know better tomorrow how to assess our future – actually, the bioregion's future, and perhaps the world's.

8 APRIL 2025

I pray to Gaia for...

Unfortunately the manuscript presented to us ends at this point. ■

Kirkpatrick Sale is the author of seven books including *Rebels Against the Future* which tells the story of the Luddite rebellion against the Industrial Revolution. He lives in New York State and is currently working on a novel set in the future.

The will to live

Exiled Egyptian feminist and novelist **Nawal El Saadawi** looks backwards to look forwards.

EVERY morning when I go for my usual walk I meet her face to face. Like me she walks deep in the forest, follows the narrow trail as it rises and falls, twists and turns. On either side there are tall slim pines, conical cedars, flowering dogwood and an occasional burst of lilac. My walk, like hers, takes me round and back to where the trail begins.

Each time we meet she smiles and nods. Her face shows wrinkles but her back is straight and the muscles of her legs are taut under tight blue jeans. Once she stopped and asked which country I was from. When I replied Egypt she drew a deep breath and

ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ PYLE

said, What a coincidence'. She was going to Egypt at the beginning of the coming year. She had always dreamt of going there ever since she was a child of ten, over 80 years ago.

My eyes opened wide in amazement. You, 90 years old?! She lifted her head up higher and said, 'I am 93'.

I had never met anyone who was 93 years old. My mother had died when she was 45. When I turned 40 I thought that, like her, I had only five more years to live. But the years went by and now I am over 60, walking through the forest every day, continuing my life and my activities as though I were young and nothing had changed.

When I was ten years old I read in my schoolbooks that a woman reaches the 'age of despair' (Sinel Ya'as) when she is 40 and stops having children. At this age most women died one form of death or the other. They were either physically buried in the earth or socially buried behind a black veil, their heads bowed down to the ground as they prayed to God for forgiveness and got ready to leave for the other world.

> ***I flew up like a bird and looked down on a world of peace and joy and love and freedom, on people beautiful with health. My land was free.***

When I was ten my imagination was unruly and had no bounds. Yet no matter how far it went it could never get beyond the next decade. I would close my eyes and try to imagine what I – and the world around me – would be like when I was 20.

I saw myself as a musician strumming the *oud* and singing and dancing. The world around me sang and danced too and everyone lived in peace and love. There was no poverty or sickness or ignorance. No discrimination between boys and girls.

At that time Egypt was called 'the society of the two per cent' because 80 per cent of the land was owned by 2 per cent of the people. At school every morning we would chant in praise of the king, God preserve him. Then the teacher would read out a sacred verse which told us to obey those who were our mentors – the provincial governors, the princes, the kings, who ruled over us. Then he read another verse which said that a woman's duty was to obey, and that obeying her husband was obedience to God and to the ruler, for they were all linked. There would be another verse explaining that God had created people to be at different levels, had made some rich and others poor. If they submitted and were patient, poor people would go to paradise and be rewarded there.

My father also taught Islam but he explained the sacred verses in a different way. Obedience to the ruler was a duty if the ruler was just, for justice was the cornerstone of Islamic government. There was no difference between a man and a woman or between an Arab and a non-Arab. And God had not created poverty or disease, or ignorance. These three blights had been inflicted by the British colonisers, the corrupt monarchical rule, and the religious leaders who traded their teachings for money and power.

When I was ten I thought the world would change in less than ten years, and I would be living in a world where both women and men enjoyed justice, love, freedom, health, knowledge, creativity and beauty. Ten years passed and the British and the King were overthrown. In the mirror I saw a tall, slim young woman, a student in the school of medicine at the University of Cairo. I could see the girls around me, their heads held up proudly as they thronged into halls to learn about science and art.

Even at 20 no matter how far my imagination leapt I could never see myself except as a woman of 30 or at the most 40. I could not think of myself as 50. But since the day I met the woman in the forest I have realized that I might live to the age of 90 or longer.

The wrinkles in my face will increase, grow deeper. But the gleam in my eyes will not fade. Why should it? That woman I saw in the forest was 93. Her eyes shone with youth and she had the bubbling laughter of a child when she asked me how I saw the future. I closed my eyes for a moment and recalled my dreams as a child of ten. I flew up like a bird and looked down on a world of peace and joy and love and freedom, on people beautiful with health. My land was free.

I opened my eyes and found myself standing in a thick forest. In Egypt there are no forests. Where was I? I remembered that I had left my country three years ago, that my land had become free only to revert to being once more 'a society of the two per cent'. Now instead of the older colonialism we have a new colonialism and corruption has grown worse than it ever was before.

Today I find myself outside the country where I belong, forced to leave by threats of death. I used to think my land was my home where I would live and where I would lie when dead. It was the land I fought to liberate when I was young. Is history repeating itself or is it true that it goes back to where it was? At 20 I used to go to university with no veil around my head. I looked at the world with an open face, for all to see. Now I see columns of female children in primary schools, their heads covered as though in shame, their eyes lowered to the ground.

Meanwhile, the dominant powers in the world support those who rule the Arab countries. The result is a widening gap between the rich and the poor and between men and women, and the growing strength of so-called 'religious fundamentalists'.

But what will the world be like 30 years from now? I believe that the capitalist, military and patriarchal system will have disappeared along with religious fundamentalist movements. They will not be able to hold out against the growing movements of those who resist: the poor, young people, women and all those struggling for a better world.

In society every force that moves in a certain direction ends up by producing and reinforcing its opposite pole. The concentration of power and money in the hands of the few who rule the world market and seek to expand it, will only unite those who resist it and strengthen relationships of solidarity from below.

The world will not retreat into more chaos, poverty and violence. The prophecies of a Christian scholar I met in Oxford last August will not come true. With his eyes half closed and looking down his pointed nose, he told me that in the year 2025 all women will be back in the home. Women's liberation will be a thing of the past, the Church will once more occupy a prominent role, and no woman will dare abort the child she carries in her womb.

He spoke with an arrogance and a disdain which reminded me of one of my professors in medical college back home. It was exactly 25 years ago that he pressed his thick fingers around my breast in a hospital clinic where I'd gone to be examined and told me: 'You have a tumour in your breast and it is malignant. I am sorry you've left it too long. You might be able to fight it for another two years but after that I can't be sure.'

I was seized with anger, with a feeling of rebellion against the way these male doctors manipulated the knowledge and tools they had at their disposal. I put on my clothes, said, 'I will live until I am 100 years old' and walked out of the door.

Deep inside I decided to live. I rejected my professor's words. I said to myself: this swelling is benign and nothing can make me think that it is not so.

Twenty-five years have passed since I took this irrevocable decision to risk all. I am alive and my professor is dead. I saw his name in the obituaries published in the daily paper *Al Ahram*. The swelling in my breast gradually shrank until it was no more. How, I do not know. Are not the cells of one's body subject to the will, to our passion for life? If we reject death can they decide not to go along the path of life which we choose?

I closed my eyes, lifted my face to the sun showing between the forest trees, and listened to the rustle of tiny leaves emerging with the hidden sap of spring. I could see myself at the age of 90 walking along the Nile near my home in Giza, covering five miles from one bridge to the other, stopping for a moment to feel the morning breeze as I rested my hand on the parapet and watched the fisherman move his oars. I could see myself strumming the *oud* and singing songs of my childhood. Around me people were on the move, going to work in a city radiant with sunshine and liberation from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, structural adjustment, Aid, AIDS, transnational corporations, neo-colonialism and religious fundamentalism.

I could see women marching forward once more, young people finding creative work to do. There was no poverty, no disease, no killing. The merchants of death had lost their voice and somehow people felt that tomorrow held a promise of growing freedom.

For is not society like the human body? When there is the will to do so it may overcome even a cancerous growth. ■

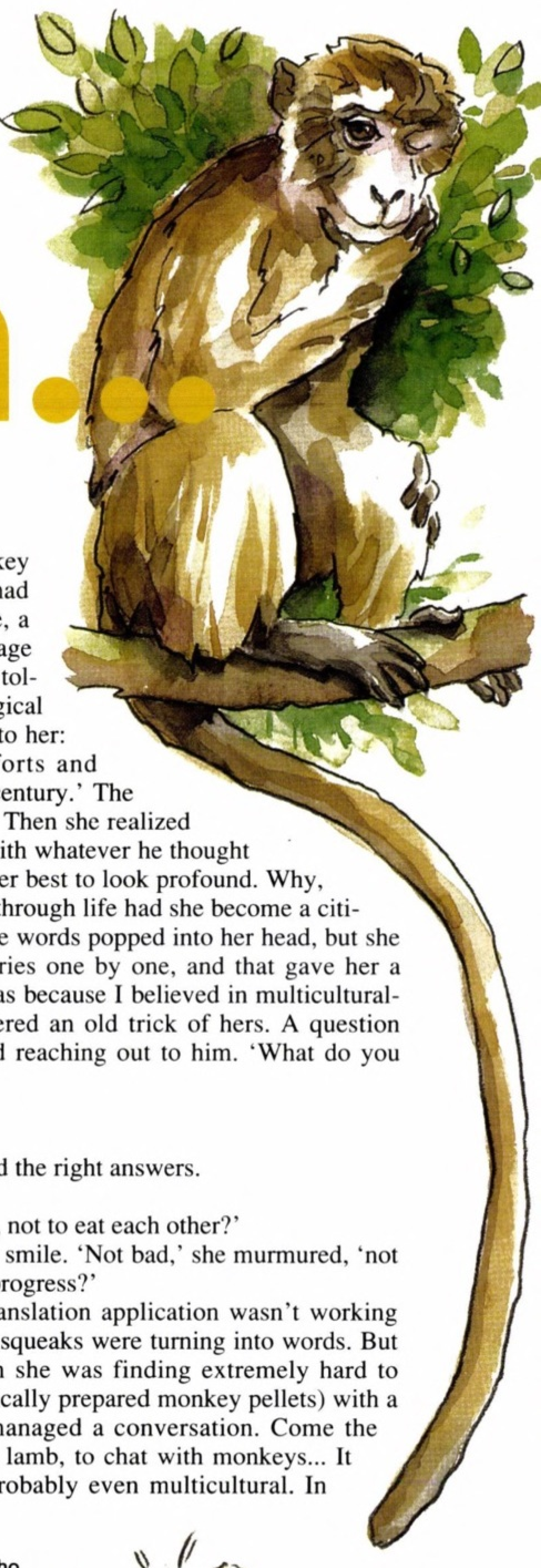
Translated by Sherif Hetata.

Nawal El Saadawi has written many books including *Woman at Point Zero* and *Circling Song* and is currently working on an autobiography. She set up the Arab Women's Solidarity Association in Cairo, but fell foul of fundamentalists. The organization was closed down by the Egyptian Government and she went into exile. She and her husband Sherif Hetata are now teaching at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

When the lion...

a multicultural fable by

Suniti Namjoshi



In her extreme old age when the one-eyed monkey had become a citizen of many countries and had won wealth, fame and even international stature, a cub reporter – yes, literally a cub, this was the age of genetic intermingling and the very notion of tolerance had at its centre the idealism based on ecological balance – Where was I? Yes, this cub reporter said to her: 'O Thinker, your life is a testimony to the efforts and achievements of the first 25 years of this nascent century.' The one-eyed monkey smiled. She thought he was done. Then she realized that that was only the greeting: his way of dealing with whatever he thought was her generation. She dropped the smile and did her best to look profound. Why, he was asking her, why in the course of her journey through life had she become a citizen of so many nations? 'Because it was useful.' The words popped into her head, but she couldn't say them. He was counting off the countries one by one, and that gave her a respite. What should she say? Should she say: 'It was because I believed in multiculturalism'? The one-eyed monkey smiled. She remembered an old trick of hers. A question sometimes deserved a question. 'Tell me', she said reaching out to him. 'What do you understand by multiculturalism?'.

'Live and let live?' he asked anxiously.

The one-eyed monkey smiled: 'Live where?'

'Here? On earth?' He was anxious to prove he had the right answers.

'And what if things get overcrowded?'

'Grow more? Eat less? Try hard, if at all possible, not to eat each other?'

This time the one-eyed monkey smiled a genuine smile. 'Not bad,' she murmured, 'not bad. And tell me,' she asked the young cub, 'is that progress?'

But the videonet link was acting up, and the translation application wasn't working properly. He was saying something. The grunts and squeaks were turning into words. But he was speaking a version of *American III*, which she was finding extremely hard to follow. Still (here she crunched a handful of scientifically prepared monkey pellets) with a little goodwill and a little technology, they had managed a conversation. Come the millennium, the lion had learned to get on with the lamb, to chat with monkeys... It was – she searched for the word – exhilarating, probably even multicultural. In cyberspace much was possible.

Suniti Namjoshi is an Indian-born poet and fable writer who has lived in Canada and now lives in England. She has published a number of books including *The Conversations of Cow*, *Feminist Fables*, *The Blue Donkey Fables* and *Saint Suniti and the Dragon*.

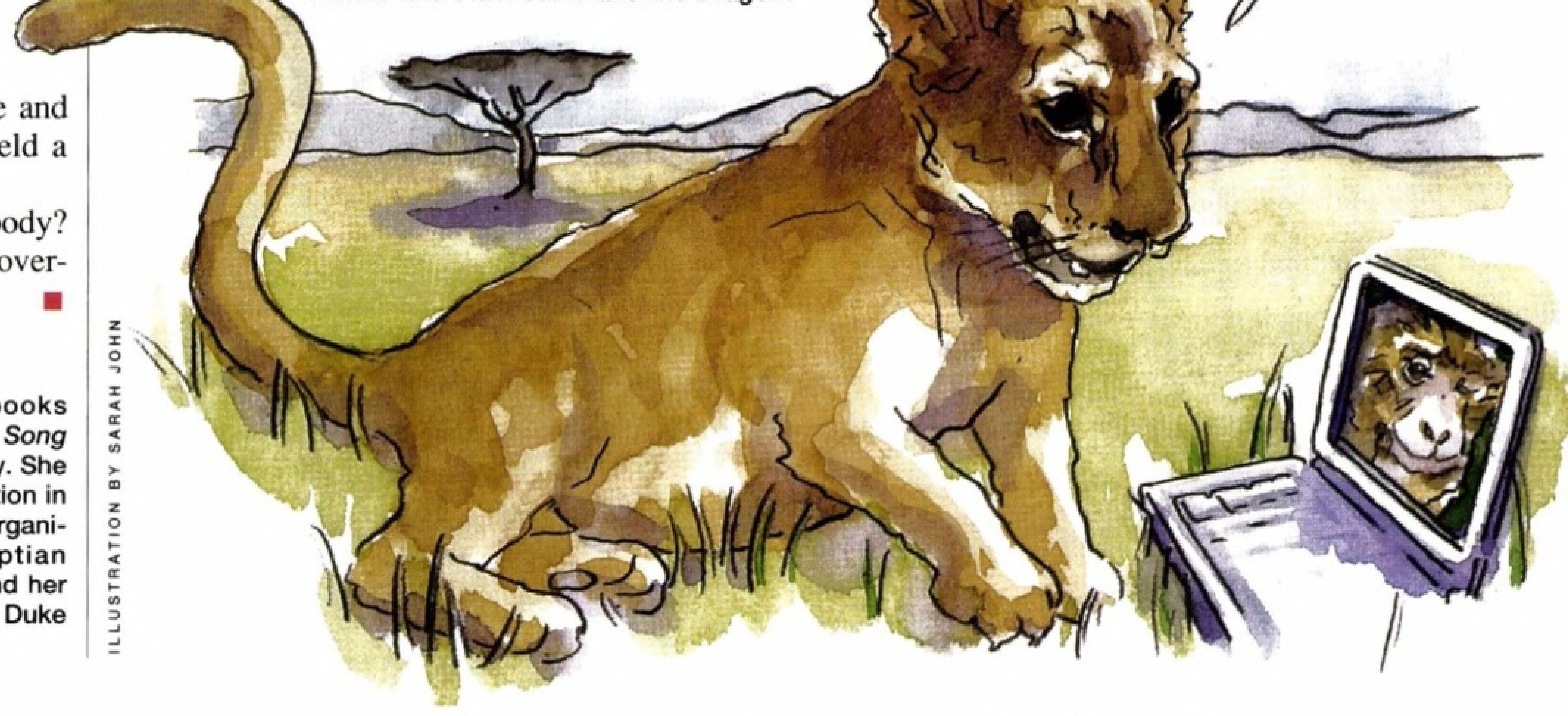


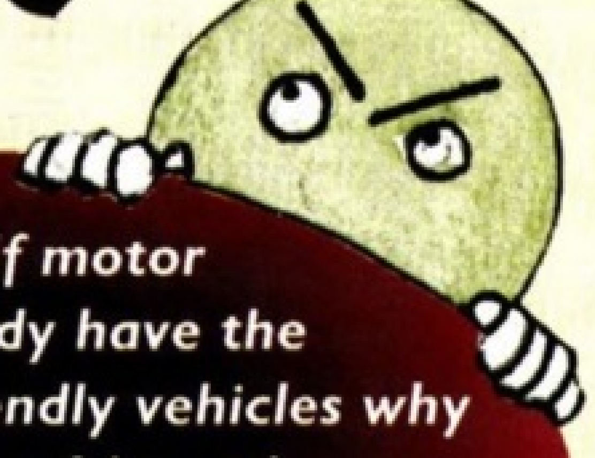
ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH JOHN

TECHNO-PASSION

New technology arouses strong passions. Will it solve our problems, create new ones or make very little difference at all? Here's a view or two on the technology that's likely to be shaping human life in the year 2025...

EASY DRIVING

Lean, clean, lightweight vehicles powered by hydrogen or electricity and which can drive themselves will get the 2025 traveller from A to B. Hydrogen cars have already been developed by several companies and vehicles can be equipped with sensors to monitor the road and surrounding vehicles. The 'driver' will be able to sit back and read a book while a computer accelerates, breaks and steers. A single lane of an automated highway could carry at least 6,000 vehicles per hour, three times more than a conventional highway. Accidents would be reduced by at least half. Fuel-saving initiatives – like car pooling and fast tracks for cars with four or more passengers – already exist and could be extended. The gas-guzzling, fossil-fuel burning vehicles that wreaked environmental havoc in the twentieth century will be consigned to the museum.

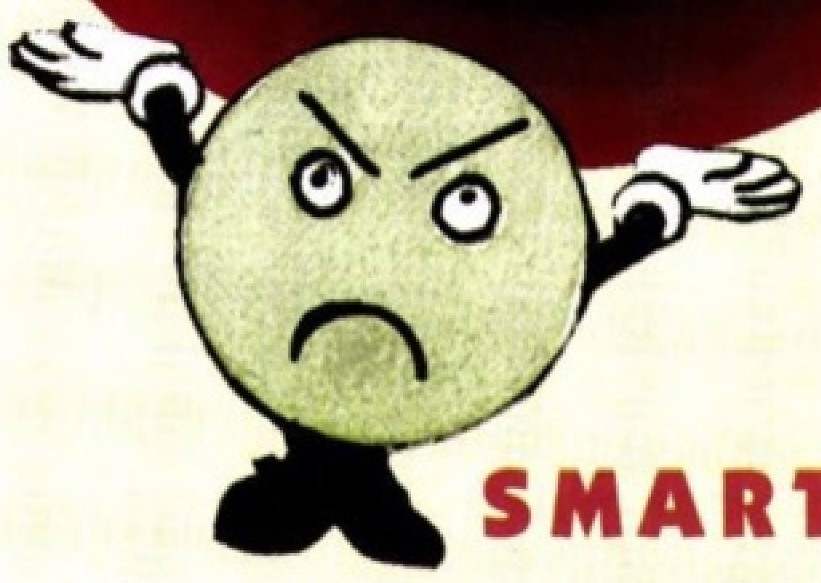


Fat chance! If motor companies already have the technology for eco-friendly vehicles why aren't they making them? 'cos it's more profitable not to change. They'll use fossil fuel till world resources run dry! And by then we can say goodbye to the ozone layer...

FRIENDLY BUILDINGS

The buildings in which the 2025 citizen will live and work are likely to be eco-friendly and quiet. Reflectors, skylights and high-tech systems that pipe sunlight deep inside will reduce the need for artificial lights. The sun will be the main source of energy. Electricity will be produced by solar photo-voltaic cells, integrated into facades or roofs. People will be able to buy power from the local utility and sell power back to it, depending on need and the time of day. Super-insulated buildings will be able to heat themselves, making use of waste heat from occupants, lights and appliances. Simple remedies will make a comeback: like planting vegetation around buildings to retain heat in winter and cool in the summer.

Excuse me, but how are homeless people in Bombay, Manila, London or New York going to benefit from your lovely eco-friendly architecture? Perhaps the arches will have eco-friendly under-bellies? Perhaps the 2025 street will have plusher gutters?



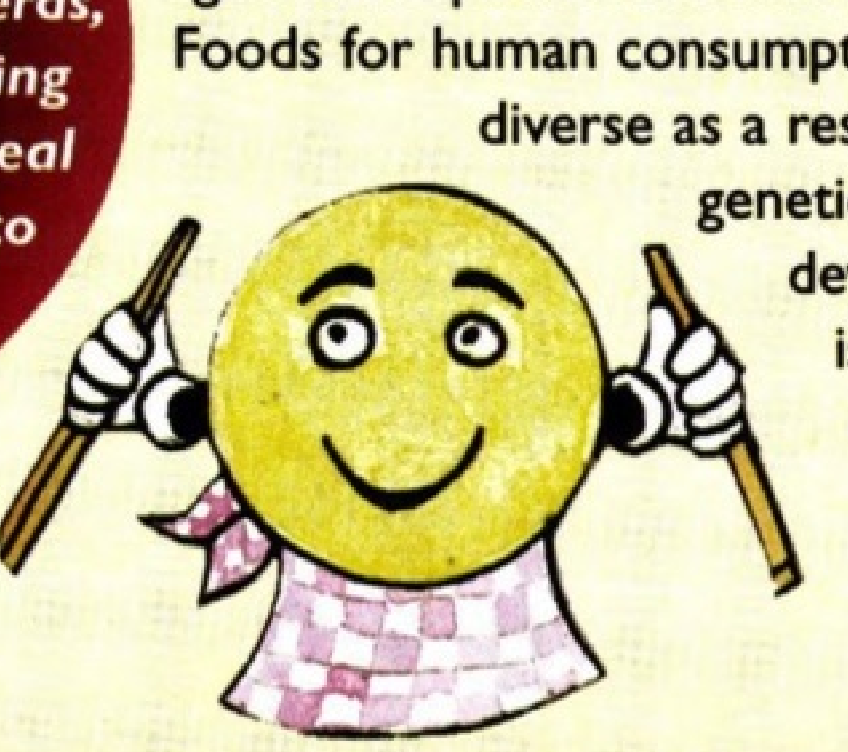
SMART INFORMATION

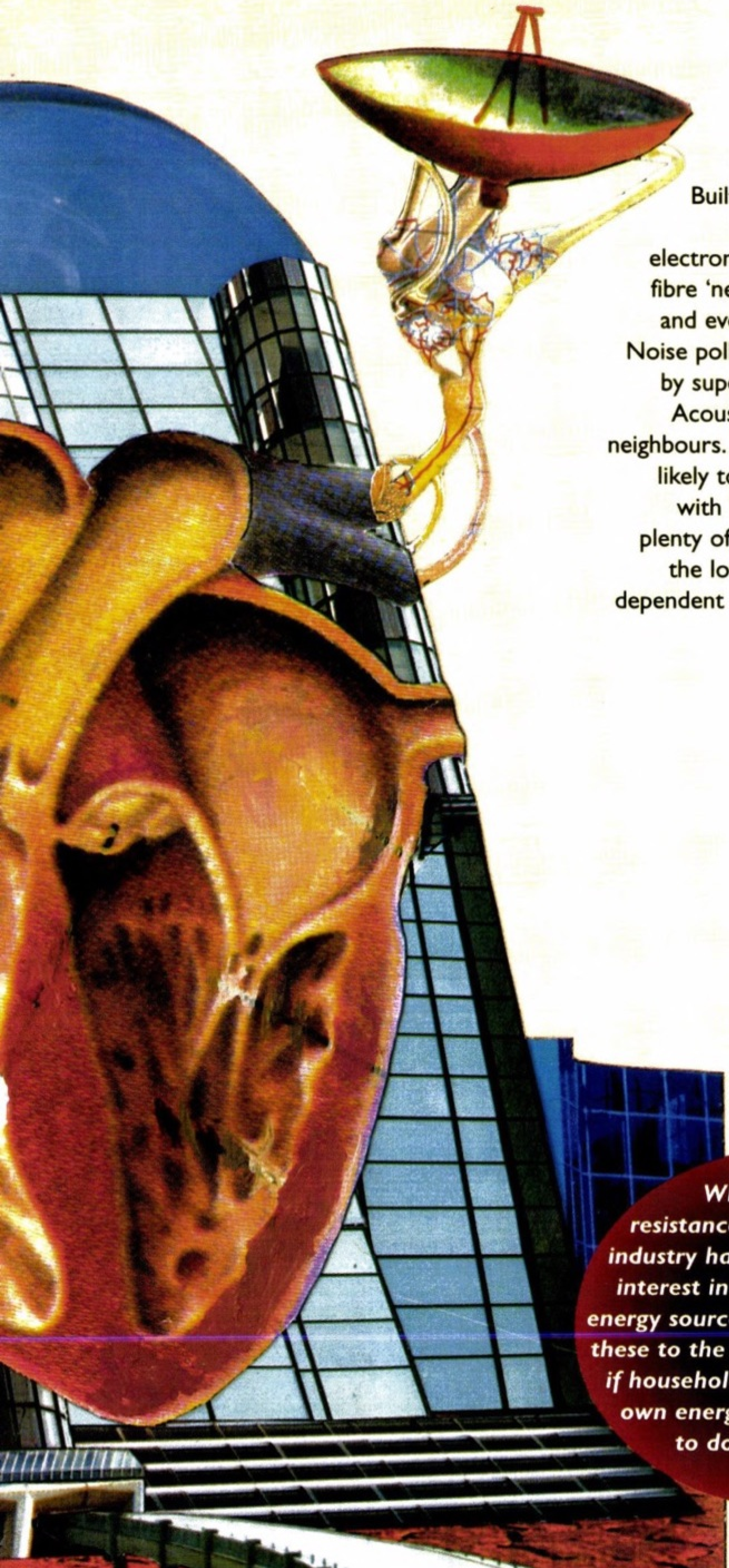
There will be a worldwide, broadband network of networks based on fibre optics. All kinds of communication – face to face, voice to voice, person to data, and data to data – will be available to any place at any time from anywhere. Education on a worldwide basis will be at a higher level and more accessible. Hand-held computers will be the norm. Money in the form of physical currency will have long been replaced by 'smart' cards. Communications vocabulary will be part of the language as people 'televote', 'teleshop', 'telework', tele-everything and mind their 'netiquette' during virtual encounters. Crime will be increasingly sophisticated, economic and computer-based.

And what about direct human contact? What about maintaining real, physical communities? Are we all going to be E-dropping, E-mail-swapping computer nerds, surfing in cyberspace instead of spending time on our real relationships, in our real communities? And is everyone going to have equal access to this information? Pull the other one!

DIET FOR

Genetic engineering will have had a profound effect on medicine. By 2025 all human ailments that have a genetic link will be identified and mapped. Direct targeted interventions for disease control will be the norm. But controversy is likely to rage over whether genetic engineering should be used to change or 'enhance' people's capacities, and those in favour will be up against the powerful holistic medicine movement. Foods for human consumption could be more diverse as a result of agricultural genetics, with crop plants developed so that each part is usable. But the prospect of dangerous, genetically-





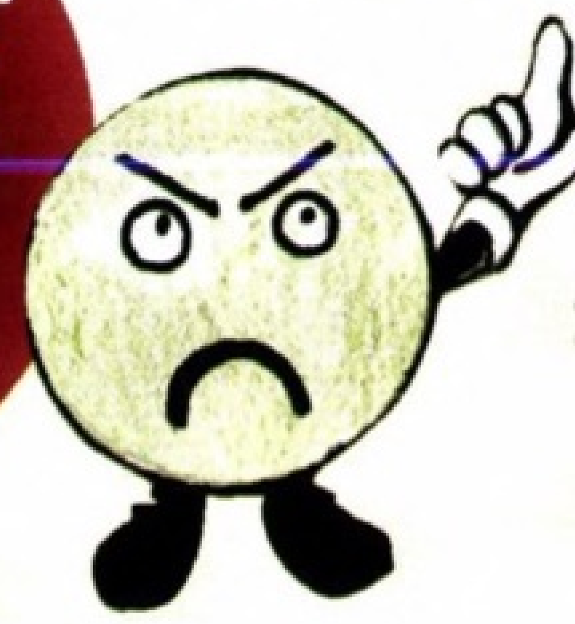
SENSITIVE CITIES

The city of 2025 could be 'sensitive', almost biological. Built into its structures – bridges, roads, buildings – will be 'sensors' that respond to changes in heat, light, noise or electromagnetic fields. A bridge, for example, would have sensitive fibre 'nerves' that could feel structural deterioration, cry out a warning and even take reparative action. It might be made of self-repairing concrete, for example. Noise pollution could also be combated. As sound travels in waves it could be cancelled out by superimposing on it an identical wave of opposite phase. Acoustic wallpaper could cut out the sound of noisy neighbours. This will be useful as the cities of 2025 are likely to follow the traditional European models with high densities combined with plenty of green space rather than the low-density, automobile-dependent sprawling cities of US and Australia.

So are we to get our bridges and walls to have our feelings for us as we live in our quiet, solipsistic cocoons, oblivious to neighbours and other 'disturbances'? What if the neighbours are calling out for help – or warning us of danger? Is the artificial to become more biological, at the cost of the biological (us humans, for example) becoming artificial?

NATURAL ENERGY

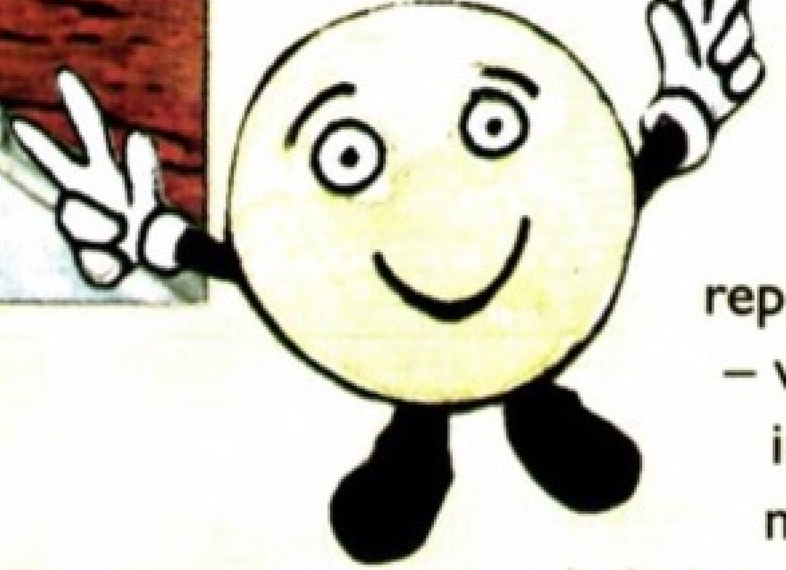
Wind farms and solar ranches will appear in the landscapes of the 2025 world. The Thar Desert in India, the Sahara in North Africa, La Ventosa in Mexico and the US Great Plains will be ideal locations. The electricity they generate will be fed into grids when demand is high and used to produce hydrogen when low. But most people will produce their own energy locally, using photovoltaic cells. Hydrogen will replace natural gas as supplies of the latter level off or are kept in the ground to reduce carbon emissions. Hydrogen is light, abundant and when combined with oxygen to produce heat or electricity the main emission is water. The technology to produce hydrogen – electrolysis – has been around since the nineteenth century. By 2025 the idea that energy should be produced from non-renewable and pollution sources will be anathema.



What about the resistance? Governments and industry have such a huge vested interest in using non-renewable energy sources that they subsidize these to the tune of billions. And if households do generate their own energy, what's that going to do to energy jobs?

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNE CAKEBREAD

SAFE AND SOUND



Remote-sensing will warn of impending natural disasters, earthquakes, landslides and flooding. Worldwide weather reporting will be routine, detailed and accurate. Biotechnology – which will be a booming industry by 2025 – may be used to help break down the awful residue of hazardous wastes left by the twentieth century. 'Smart' non-lethal weapons that halt aggressive acts will have replaced lethal weapons for peace-keeping and policing.

Biotechnology will be a source of danger – not security! Sure, non-lethal weapons are nicer – but there will always be people wanting to use lethal ones. The real issue is: what are we going to do about inequalities of power? What are we going to do about a worldwide culture of militarism? What answers has technology got for that, I ask you?!!

HEALTH

engineered organisms being accidentally released into the environment is a hazard 2025 citizens will have to live with. In the richer countries vegetarianism will have become the norm – for health, environmental and ethical reasons. For carnivores with a conscience, 'Nanotechnology' will have provided the answer: by redesigning cellular structures it will be possible to turn hay into steak without involving a cow.

'Controversy is likely to rage'. Too bloody right! What multinational corporations are going to control biotechnology? And who is going to control them? They are already richer and more powerful than national governments. And now we are going to let them take control of the genetic stuff of life itself? You can keep your veggie beef, thank you!

Sources: *New Scientist*, 15 October 1994, IPC magazines, London.
The Futurist, July-August 1994, World Future Society, Bethesda, Maryland.
Power Surge, Christopher Flavin and Nicholas Lenssen, Earthscan, 1995

A history of amnesia

A man writes to his son.

Jamal Mahjoub

on the search for memory lost.

You may remember that it took me 30 years to write this story. Thirty long years, I might add, during which time it was one of the few things in the world which I could rely upon. It was a tangible constant, unlike other things I might mention, such as wives, families and children; a series of unfortunate events, none of which had any direct bearing on this story. The only thing with which this matter could be compared is that fascination which we call love, for it was such an obsession.

One might consider 30 years to be a little long to write something as simple as a story. It is a long time; a lifetime in your case. Why did I do it? What kept me at it ? The long sleepless nights, the frustrations, the crumpled sheets of paper, not to mention the eternal domestic conflicts incurred by such a hopeless pursuit? The stories became my life, it is as simple as that and my life became the stories. Everything else fell outside the limits of that ring of light. And who could not say that he did not regret having been blind?

You ask me, so I will tell you: the world fell apart long before you were born. The image which had been so preserved for, well for as long as anyone could remember, was suddenly shattered. Before the world as we know it now came into being, there was another world; very similar in many ways, but on the whole quite different. Of course it looked much the same as it does now; a blue ball bobbing along in that inky black ocean of space. They even sent some poor fools out there to take a photograph, just to prove the fact; which goes to show just how primitive they were in those days. It is still the same floating ball, perhaps not quite as blue, a little more grey maybe, like everything else.

A lonely, heart-broken place was the world into which you squeezed; plagued by suffering and war of every description. Time began to accelerate and as it did so, so it seemed that the dream to whose task humans had set themselves began to metamorphose, to change shape. It stretched and it bent, this way and that, like a star folding in on itself, like a box, or one of those black holes which sucks in all of its own light. The world suffered a series of catastrophes, some of them freaks of nature, but the majority of them were human-made. People began to question the role of humans in the scheme of things and there was a resurgence of shallow religious soul-searching.

...slogans bounced around the globe like decapitated heads in sixteenth-century Paris.

By this time of course I was completely dedicated to what was to become this story – or stories, for in truth it was like a finely woven tapestry – although I was not aware of it at the time. I embarked on a series of projects, each one completely absorbing in its own right, and each one but a tiny step along the way, although it was not until later that I was able to see this.

We had entered the age of the Information Revolution, as it was called. It was no different from any of those other infamous events that dot the charts of history. Yes, people cheered and waved their banners; metaphorically speaking of course, slogans bounced around the globe like decapitated heads in sixteenth-century Paris.

Things happened very quickly. The world was divided, no longer by borderlines that ran along the earth, but by invisible strata that filled the air like clouds which you could not quite grasp. The transglobal and the local became interchangeable. Everyone was either on the move, or thinking about it. There was no longer any difference between what happened right in front of you and what happened on the other side of the world. A

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN MOORE

similar thing happened to reality – people could no longer tell the difference between inter-space and the real world; which of them after all was real? Philosophy could not help us and neither could religion.

I see that I am already in danger of becoming side-tracked. Of course everything was relative. Those parts of the world which were excluded from this new exchange simply vanished. That is to say nothing was ever heard from them. No-one knew whether people still lived there anymore and thus they ceased to exist. Of course one aspect of this revolution was the dissolution of countries as such. They had been crumbling for a long time and with the instability and general decay of the less wealthy regions of the world, it seemed wiser to form new conglomerate blocs. Like everything of course, this never worked out the way it was planned, but was rather an absurd parody. No sooner were they formed and secure than they began to eat away at themselves from within.

No matter; the world had grown much smaller, and it was to continue to do so. The poor and the rich lived side by side, if not on top of one another. New feudal states were formed around individuals, corporations and mercantile banks. They formed their own subcultures within the main cultural sphere. Where wealth resided they constructed the equivalent of kingdoms; huge shining towers of glass and steel. These contained everything necessary for the existence of the inhabitants. Because of the difficulties of travel, people stayed at home, where it was safe and comfortable and they really had no need of anything. It was this isolation which brought about the Information Revolution itself, which had actually happened some decades before, only no-one had actually noticed. The second time around it was no longer radical, but it was far more powerful, because it was necessary.

They constructed a series of invisible nets which they threw around the world. They tore down the stars and threw up hundreds of gleaming alloy orbs to hold the threads together. People spoke to one another across thousands of miles of empty space. They could not open a window, but they could make babies with someone on the other side of the world without leaving their room. This net grew of course, something like a giant tuber or beanshoot maybe, growing thicker and stronger as it circled the planet. And inside this was concealed all the radiance and brilliance of humankind; the achievements of centuries.

In the old days they used to fight over land, but land had by now been deemed worthless. A series of hypothetical lands appeared and were subsequently the focus of heated frenzy. For a time, all that counted was knowledge about these lands; worlds within worlds and since no-one dared to go out and find these places, no-one could really prove whether they existed or not. Information was being shovelled back and forth like iron ore or stone. It clogged up the mind the way lead fumes used to, like coal dust in the lungs.

We decided to withdraw, to return to a timescale measured by the rise and fall of the sun.

It was out of this that our group was formed. We were radical in those days, our motto was 'Communication, not information!'. We got together to adopt a country. This was the way of things then. Since the collapse of the UN in a scandal whereby countries had been sold off to a chain of mafia-like charity organizations there was nothing to stop anyone wishing to involve themselves this way. This was not really so bad. Private investment had been what governments had been doing anyway. It cleared the air. Outside the places where wealth resided the world had also splintered into tribes and camps of the most primitive and bizarre form. There were countries devoted to the worship of whales; different forms of superstition; political ideologies; sexual orientations of every kind; automobiles; cosmologies; cutlery; in fact anything one could think of. Somewhere inside all this confusion there was humanity and it was this to which we were determined to devote ourselves.

By now some of the problems I was up against might be clear: no matter how fast I worked, it seemed to be slipping out of my hands at every turn. We decided to withdraw, to return to a timescale measured by the rise and fall of the sun. It sounds simple-minded, and perhaps it was, but it was all we could do.

Then came the Last Great Plague, a virus that raged through the electronic archives eating up everything it could find. An epidemic of such proportions that nothing could withstand it. Everything was lost; the entire sum total of human existence was gone forever. Books had long since been recycled into toilet paper and what have you. Writers and intellectuals had been siphoned out to make way for technologists whose knowledge was worthless without the archives to activate them. We were left with nothing.

The great cities of past civilization were closed to us. The language which they used was a hybrid form so that although we knew the foundation upon which it was based, we could not decipher the layers of slang and new words. We were alone, and from this came the stories.

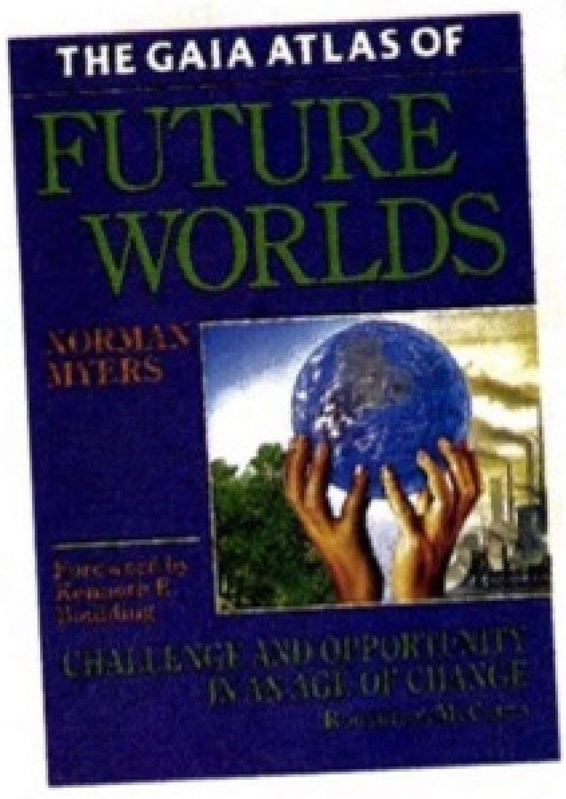
The future was no longer somewhere in the far off distance, but here and now. Where the stories came from, nobody really knew, but they began to grow, building upon one another naturally and of their own accord. They were our story, collectively, alone. They helped to pass the long starlit evenings; stars for which we only had the ancient names. Each story was a guide, a pointer toward something that we called ourselves. The history of the world was to begin again.

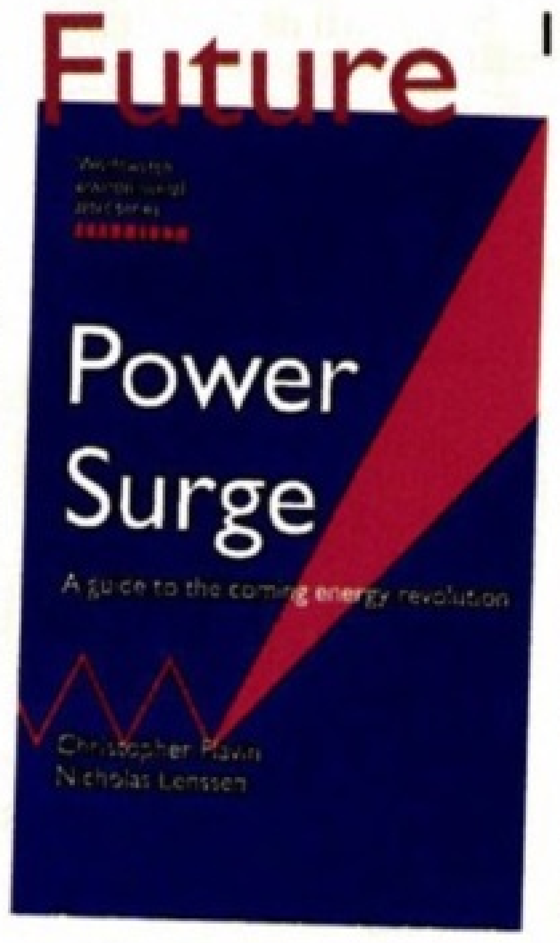
I have no idea where you are or whether you will ever find this, or even whether you will be able to decipher this message; but know that I have not given up, that I am still working, and one of these days this work will be done and there will no longer be any need to wince at the word memory: for we will have regained our ability to remember. ■

Jamal Mahjoub is a Sudanese-British writer living in Denmark. He has published two novels: *Navigation of a Rainmaker* and *Wings of Dust*, both published in the Heinemann African Writers' series. In 1993 he won the Guardian-Heinemann competition, for the short story *The Cartographer's Angel*.

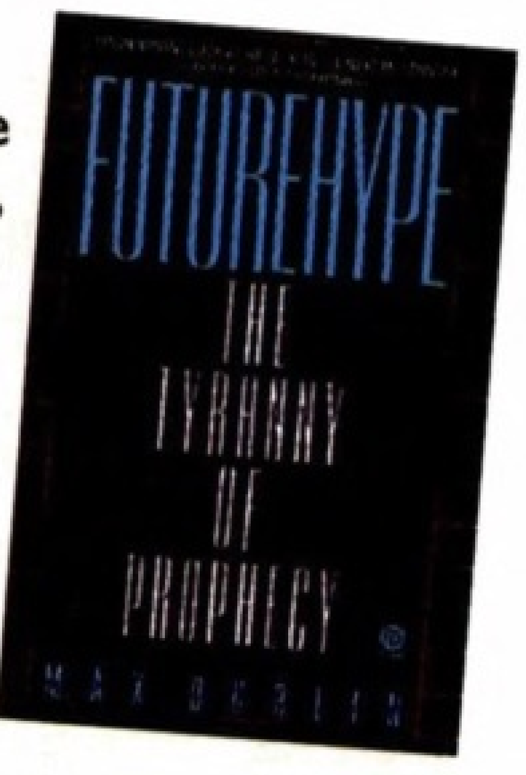
Worth reading... on the Future

Some of the more interesting non-fiction exists in the form of collections of essays. **Visions for the 21st Century** edited by Sheila Moorcroft (Adamantine Press, London, 1992) is a good example with contributions from a wide range of writers – including Vaclav Havel – from different perspectives. Shaped somewhat by the editor's self-confessed optimism, it is refreshingly mind-expanding, thoughtful and non-technological. **Preparing for the Future** edited David Hicks (Adamantine Press, London, 1994) is another example in the same series, aimed more specifically at 'concerned' educators.





The Gaia Atlas of Future Worlds (Gaia, London, 1990) by Norman Myers has a clearly 'green' agenda, but is well-conceived and illustrated and is still relevant five years on. **Power Surge** by Christopher Flavin and Nicholas Lenssen (Earthscan, London, 1995) is a thorough, and inspiring approach to the crucial question of power sources for the future. It strongly makes the point that we already have the technology – it's just the political commitment that's lacking. In **The World in 2020** (Harper Collins, London, 1994) financial journalist Hamish McRae sticks his neck out and makes specific predictions, but very much from a rich world, traditional economics viewpoint.



US pop-futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler – authors of the best-sellering *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave* – are at the more entertaining end of the market. They package their ideas in a lively anecdotal way, but their political leanings seem to be increasingly to the Right. **War and Anti-War** (Warner Books, London 1995) is as lively as ever – but you have to keep an eye on its underlying assumptions. An excellent anti-futurist book – which rips into the likes of the Tofflers – is Max Dublin's **Futurehype: The Tyranny of Prophecy** (Plume Books, New York, 1992). He argues his case well, dealing scathingly, section by section, with various forms of 'hype'. His argument only seems to wear thin (almost to the point of disappearance) when he tries to tackle 'eco-hype' in a much shorter section towards the end.

United Nations agency reports are not renowned for forward and imaginative thinking. But UNDP's annual **Human Development Report** (OUP, Oxford and New York, 1994) is an exception. It's full of ideas and well as facts and is actually quite readable. And the increasing importance of the UN in shaping the future is reflected in Michael Marien's annotated guide, **World Futures and the United Nations** (World Future Society, Bethesda Maryland, US, 1995). There are number of magazines worth looking at. **The Futurist** – the magazine of the World Futures Society – is quite a mixed bag, tending slightly more towards the newsy and technological side than the philosophical side, but including both. **Futures** (Camford Group, Cambridge, England) is firmly at the philosophical end of the spectrum.

The NI Interview

Bruce Harris

Richard Swift meets an outspoken advocate for Guatemala's street kids.

ILLUSTRATION: ALAN HUGHES

'He was the first kid I've ever seen dead.' Bruce Harris draws a slow breath and says, only half seriously, that if he knew then what he knew now he might never have continued his risky work with Guatemala's street kids. The death of Jorge Nahaman marked a watershed for Harris and his fellow workers at Covenant House, an advocacy centre for street children in Guatemala City. Jorge was kicked to death by four policemen on 4 March 1990. 'His death had a tremendous impact on us and on the other street kids,' says Harris. 'After that we started documenting the violence and prosecuting the perpetrators.'

It wasn't long before the threats started. 'They came looking for me and they sprayed our centre with machine-gun fire. I had to move my family to Costa Rica. Now I go back every two or three weeks, rattle some cages and run like hell.'

Harris, a blunt, sandy-haired middle-aged American, recalls how things have changed from his first days in Guatemala. 'A number of our staff were beaten up by the police and one was even murdered by the military police. It used to be when one of the kids mentioned *Casa Alianza* [Covenant House] it would raise ire. Now it offers some protection, not out of respect but out of fear of the fuss we might create.'

Harris is quick to credit international pressure with stopping police harassment of Covenant House in Guatemala. 'They know we are not by ourselves. That's why we have survived.' He gives full credit to individual letter writers in the North. 'If it weren't for Amnesty International supporters I wouldn't be alive today. It may seem naive to think your little letter will have any effect as you sit there in your garden in Dorset or wherever. But each letter makes street kids a little less vulnerable.'

Harris is under no illusions as to how much can be achieved. 'Guatemala City is divided into 15 zones,' he explains. 'We've only worked in four but we've initiated 195 law suits and are suing 123 policemen and 48 members of the military for the torture and murder of children.'

'Policemen see themselves as teachers trying to give tough lessons to the kids,' Harris says. 'Then it just gets out of control. It was easier to kill the kids than to rehabilitate them. And it could be done with relative impunity. Recently, though, there's been a shift. Now, because of our work, the police have stopped murdering street children. Instead it's the country's 14,000 private security police who are doing the killing: 1994 was the worst year ever. And because they are private the government washes its hands of any responsibility.'

The blunt statistics trip easily off Harris's lips. 'There are 100 million street children in the world and 40 million of those are in Latin America. If that many people were in one country they'd have a seat at the UN. Instead they are ignored. The law is a luxury in Guatemala, but without a legal aid office to advocate for the kids there might as well be no law at all. Right now the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is just a paper tiger.'

Harris identifies machismo as one key to why there are so many street children in Guatemala. 'A man's children are everything but other people's kids are nothing,' he says. 'We don't use the word poverty, its too passive. Rather we use the term "economic violence" to describe what's happening to the kids. Initially they survive by washing cars, begging or doing little jobs. Later they get into stealing and prostitution. Addiction to shoe glue and paint thinner is also a problem.'

Harris calls these intoxicants 'poor people's drugs' and believes they are a pragmatic response to the hunger and cold of the streets. But his face clouds with anger as he talks about the source of some of these drugs: HB Fuller, a US company based in St. Paul, Minnesota. 'They sell a cheap toxic shoe glue,' Harris snaps, 'which is basically a narcotic that can't even be sold in North America. It's widely available in Latin America even though there are non-toxic alternatives. Street children buy it and that's a huge market.' HB Fuller has 15 per cent of their sales in Latin America and 26 per cent of their global profits. 'If half the street kids in Latin America sniff glue, that's 20 million consumers using half a gallon a month. Ten million gallons of glue: who wants to loose that market? We've asked them to stop, begged them. But if they won't, damn it, we'll go for the jugular. We've already got one wrongful death suit against them in Texas on behalf of a street kid in Guatemala who died from inhaling.'

Since Guatemala's Covenant House opened up in the mid-1980s other organizations to help street kids have sprung up there and elsewhere in Latin America. But Harris is candid about the limited effects such organizations can have. 'Forty million kids are not going to be cared for by 100 NGOs. We need to pressurize Latin American governments to take responsibility. But these children are not a priority and never will be as long as they're seen as just trash to be hidden away.' ■

You can contact Bruce Harris at Casa Alianza, Apartado 2704, Guatemala City, Guatemala.

Reviews

film

Ermo: groundbreaking for Chinese cinema in that it deals with women's desires.

Ermo

directed by Zhou Xiaowen

Set in contemporary China, this story of a rural woman's attempts to make some changes in her life is a smart comment on the transformations that the country is going through as it catapults into the late twentieth century. The fact that Xiaowen has been able to make and distribute the gently satirical film is also indicative of change. In the past his work has been banned and at one point he had to resort to making mainstream 'action' films. The protagonist of the story is the feisty Ermo who supports her veteran husband and little boy by making and selling 'twisty noodles' in the local city. Trudging between her village and the market every day, she is joined in her monotonous routine by a good-looking neighbour who goes by the puzzling name of Blindman. Soon she finds herself tempted not only by the various goodies on sale in the city shops – which include a magnificently large TV set that she has her eyes on – but by him as well.

At its most basic, Ermo is a film about belongings and longing. It is clear that Ermo is sexually frustrated as much as anything else – and the film is groundbreaking for Chinese cinema in that it deals with a woman's desires. But it falls foul of Western sensibilities about sexist stereotyping: Blindman is attracted to Ermo because he is fed up with his plump and 'nagging' wife. Eventually the two women are prompted to lash out at each other in cat-fight style. The director's intention might have been to inject a bit of knockabout humour but the scene fractures the film. Such stereotypical moments need an ironic twist – something Xiaowen is clearly capable of doing but has failed to do in this instance. The film, otherwise, works brilliantly as an indictment of capitalist values: Ermo literally gives blood so that she and her family can be the envy of the village with their monumental TV set. As, finally, she scans for meaning in her own exhausting scams, the film tunes into the disconcerting consequences of the changes around her.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ **LF**

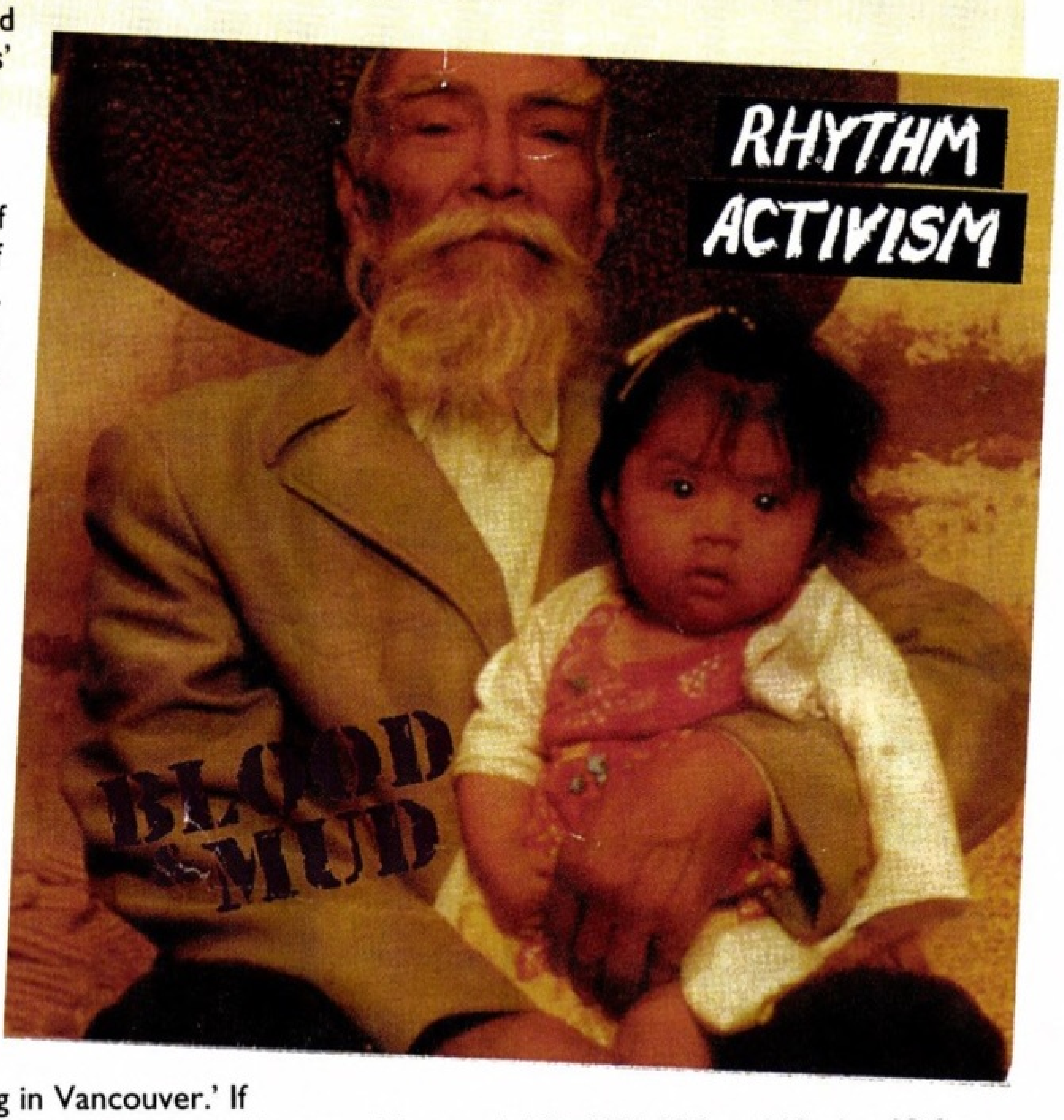
music

Blood and Mud

by Rhythm Activism

From out of Montreal's lively, artistic, anarchist underground comes **Blood and Mud**. Inspired by the Zapatista uprising, it's a stunning mix of violins, grating guitars, quirky sound effects and humour. Norman Nawrocki's growl-speak (he isn't a great singer) is just right for tracks about the life in the free zone and does a nice tongue-in-cheek advertisement for jobs in the NAFTA-inspired *maquiladoras* as well. The CD runs from lush stylized ballads to what Rhythm Activism calls 'gypsy grunge'. This is the band's twelfth release since 1986 when they came on the scene with their unique brand of rock-'n'-roll cabaret, targeting male machismo and supporting Canadian native struggles by the Mohawks (Oka) and the Innu (Labrador).

This album is coloured by the dark humour of the oppressed, familiar to readers of B Traven or viewers of the mural art of Sequires and Rivera. When on stage Rhythm Activism are likely to appear dressed as anything from cockroaches to skeletons and their audiences and venues are far from the usual concert circuit. 'We did the underground cabaret scene in Poland; we played squats in France; we played anti-apartheid demonstrations in Holland; we came back to Canada and did the Canadian Labour Congress convention in Montreal and a wedding in Vancouver.' If you are interested in this quirky mix of Latin American styles arid lively politics, have a listen to **Blood and Mud**. Available from Les Pages Noires, PO Box 391, Desjardins Station, Montreal, PQ, H5B 1B9 at $12 plus $2 for postage and handling.



Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ **RS**

books

Funny Boy

by Shyam Selvadurai

(Jonathan Cape ISBN 0771079508)

This is an engaging book by a young Sri Lankan author now living in Toronto. Shyam Selvadurai offers us a set of simply-crafted stories portraying the coming-of-age of Arjie Chelvaratnam, a sensitive boy growing up in a typical upper-middle-class Tamil family in Colombo from the late 1960s to the 1983 riots. The escalating political tensions on the island impinge upon the personal turbulence of the boy as he struggles with his sexuality, authority structures, and his relationship with his family. The author does not set out to put a 'human face' on the everyday victims of the conflict, but that is what his stories do.

Funny Boy has no particular political axe to grind. Ethnic tensions weave through the lives of the characters in this book the same way as they weave through the lives of those who live on the island.

And as you read between the lines you can discern all those structures and processes that keep up inter-group tensions. The reality – and unreality – of ethnic violence is vividly seen through the eyes of the boy: 'Our daily routine had been cast away, while the rest of the world was going on as usual. A man I had known – a man who was my mother's lover – was now dead. I was aware that it was a significant thing, but like a newspaper report on an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, it seemed something that happened outside my reality, my world.'

Though rich in political subtext **Funny Boy** stands as literature in its own right. If you know something about Sri Lanka, you will enjoy it. If you don't, chances are you will enjoy it just as much!

Politics ☆☆☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ **KDB**

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

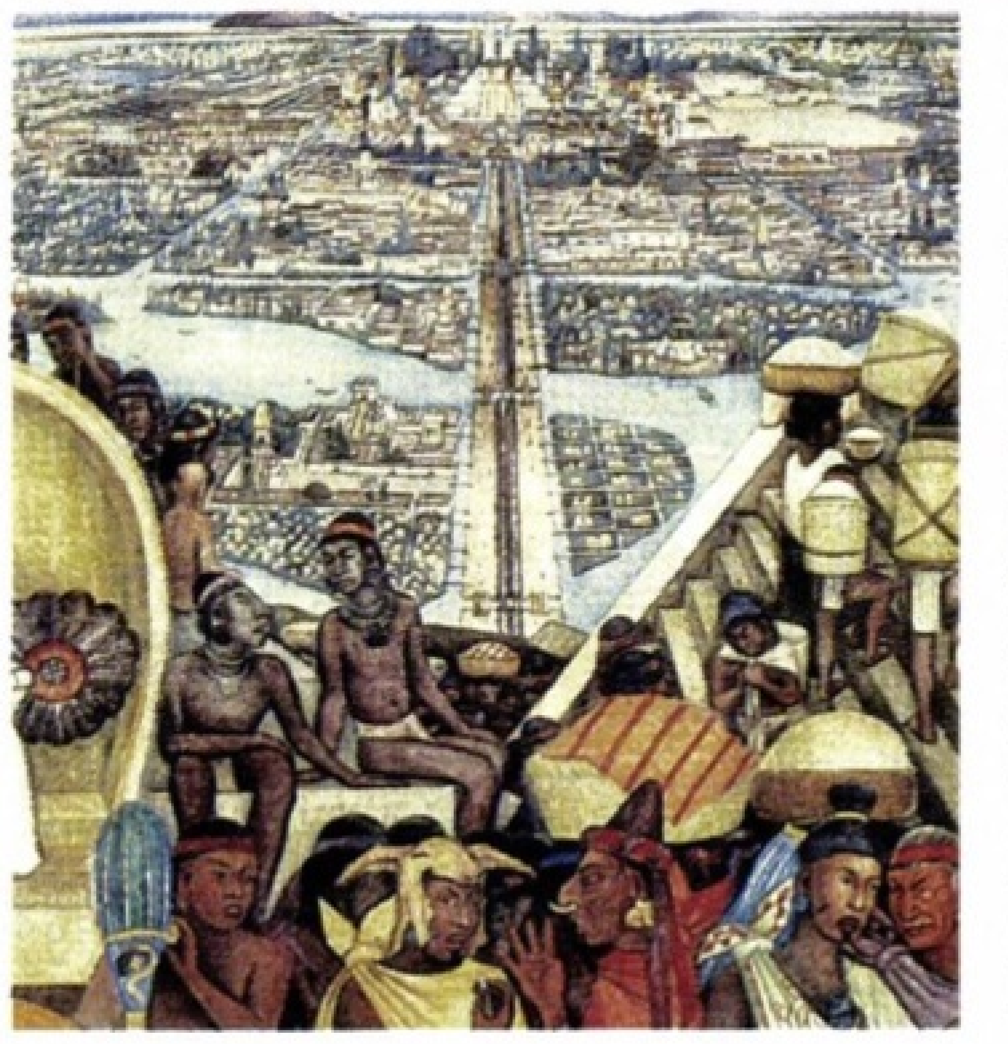
Reviews by **Richard Swift, Lizzie Francke** and **Kenneth D Bush**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

THE **CLASSIC**

The City in History

...being the book that explains the rise and fall of the metropolis.

DID YOU KNOW that what is currently the world's third most populous city is a mere 30 miles from the ruins of what used to be the world's sixth largest? I didn't myself until I recently made the one-hour bus trip from Mexico City to Teotihuacán. From the vantage point of the Pyramid of the Sun I was able to look over the hot, mountain-encircled valley which houses what was once the capital of Mexico's biggest pre-Hispanic empire. My *Lonely Planet* guide book told me that Teotihuacán, constructed between 150 and 600 AD, was 'a true city in that many classes of people lived and worked in it'. At its height, in the sixth century, its population is thought to have been 200,000. The people were literate, used the bar-and-dot number system, and observed the 260-day sacred year. The city's political, economic, religious and cultural influence on pre-Hispanic Central America was enormous. But in the seventh century it was fired, plundered and abandoned. What remains and what has been reconstructed of its awesome, forbidding architecture only emphasizes the fact that it is a city no longer. For a city isn't a city without people, and visiting day-trippers don't make it one.



DIEGO RIVERA

Lewis Mumford's **The City in History**, published in 1961, doesn't mention Teotihuacán even once. It's not that Mumford was remiss or culturally blind in overlooking it – his massive book has a truly global range of reference. But Teotihuacán's narrative of urban emergence, eminence and collapse can be told of hundreds of other long-forgotten cities. Mumford tells of this rise and fall most fully and most frighteningly in a chapter on ancient Rome entitled 'From Megalopolis to Necropolis'. Here, Mumford wants us to know that 'Rome remains a significant lesson of what to avoid'. He is insistent that an historical understanding of the processes of urban dissolution is a truly practical knowledge, and his chapter ends with an inventory of 'danger signals', of 'symptoms of the end'. These include overcrowding, high rents, poor housing, dependence on distant territories for key resources, roads designed primarily for vehicles, the ubiquity of sex, alcohol and violence, and 'above all, the massive collective concentration on glib ephemeralities of all kinds'. It reads ominously like a list of dominant trends in urban development of the last half century. 'When these signs multiply, Necropolis is near, though not a stone has yet crumbled.' There is more than a touch of the apocalyptic in **The City in History**. Mumford, who died in 1990, was writing at the absolute height of the Cold War, when the prospect of entire cities being eradicated by single nuclear strikes often seemed likely.

Mumford was no enemy of cities. The book is not a critique of urban living, but of the failure to develop a political system to ensure that the technological advance that makes large cities possible does not become the technological anarchy which causes their destruction. Ultimately it diagnoses monumental deficiencies in economic organization. Mumford was quick to express the view that the impressive post-war reconstruction of cities could be further enriched where 'the economy was directly oriented to human needs and... the major part of the national income was not diverted to... studious consumptive dissipations and planned destructions'.

But it was precisely these commercial and military excesses – Mumford is memorably bitter about nuclear weapons – which he witnessed reasserting themselves throughout the 1950s. **The City in History** was undoubtedly conceived by its author partly as a political intervention against this trend. The book is as much polemic as it is treatise. Its rhetoric is peculiarly, though not relentlessly, pessimistic. Mumford's concluding plea is for 'the development of a more organic world picture, which shall do justice to all the dimensions of living organisms and human personalities'.

I can't say I felt much more optimistic than Mumford, as my bus hummed and chugged its way back from Teotihuacán to the pollution-engulfed, congested and inflation-beset Mexico City. A few days later I was reminded that mere affluence isn't a solution. On my way to Britain I stopped off in Houston, a huge metropolis whose downtown – its skyscrapers throwing permanent shadows over silent and evacuated streets – reminded me eerily of Teotihuacán. I recalled the phrase 'magnifications of demoralized power, minifications of life' with which Mumford describes the decadent signs of a city on the verge of collapse. And on the plane to London, when I found myself staring in incredulity at newspaper photographs of the recently destroyed Grozny, I imagined that those who executed that needless spoliation must have twisted this phrase into an imperative: 'Magnify demoralized power! Minify life!' At moments like these you wish **The City in History** were more widely read. ■

Macdonald Daly

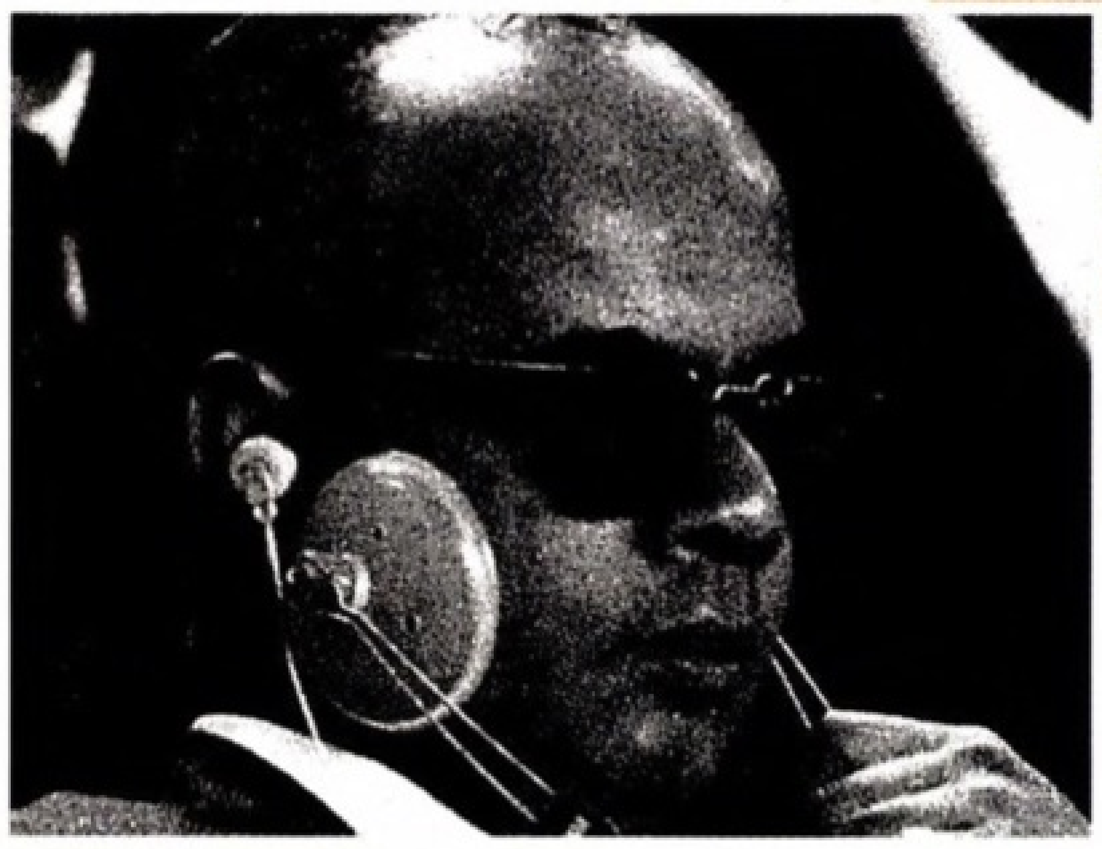
The City in History: its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects* by *Lewis Mumford* is *published by Secker & Warburg, 1961.

Curiosities

QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

Has anyone calculated the extent to which Britain's former colonies helped make it a 'developed' nation? What has been their economic impact over the centuries.

● The most famous historian on this subject is Eric Williams, former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. His 1944 book *Capitalism and Slavery* argued that the wealth produced by the plantation system in the Americas was crucial to the industrialization of Great Britain. The profits generated by slave labour in the Caribbean were reinvested in places like Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool, permitting the development of Britain's first industrial regions. The slave trade also spurred commerce in commodities and boosted such sectors as shipbuilding.


CAMERA PRESS

Historian and politician Eric Williams

The economic activities carried out in Britain's New World colonies were undoubtedly extremely exploitative and produced significant profits for investment in other forms of economic activity. But how essential were these funds and colonial trade to the larger process of British economic growth? 'Not very' most recent research suggests. Both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars such as Robert Brenner and Patrick O'Brien have shown that the key stimulus to British industrialization was the existence of much closer markets, in Europe and in Britain itself. In the process, of course, the labour of countless Britons was expropriated. It now seems clear that British people need not look very far in seeking explanations of their country's early development.

Ryan Stanley
Kingston, Canada

● The *Third World Atlas* (Oxford University Press, ISBN 0 335 10259x) offers the following estimates: The profits from British slave ships were $110 million; slave labour $375 million; the opium trade $60 million; and Indian land revenue $150 million. Multiplication by 500 gives a rough conversion to present day values. While clearly impoverishing those who provided this wealth, its exact economic impact on Britain is more complex. The authors note that 'by boosting the fortunes of rich landowners and merchants [this pillage] may actually have postponed the rise of industrial capitalism'.

David Riebold
Lanzarote, Canary Islands

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

What are the benefits or disadvantages of adding fluoride to tap water?

CE Clarke
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

When Germans refer to travelling people they call them 'Roma' or 'Sinti'. 'Roma' is clearly related to Rom, but who are the Sinti? My German-English dictionary just says 'Sinte', which leaves me none the wiser.

Susan Pomeroy
Harpenden, England

What evidence is there that children vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella at an early age will enjoy lasting immunity? What is the risk of their developing these diseases at a later age, when they can be more serious?

Elizabeth Cullen
Mount Charles, Ireland

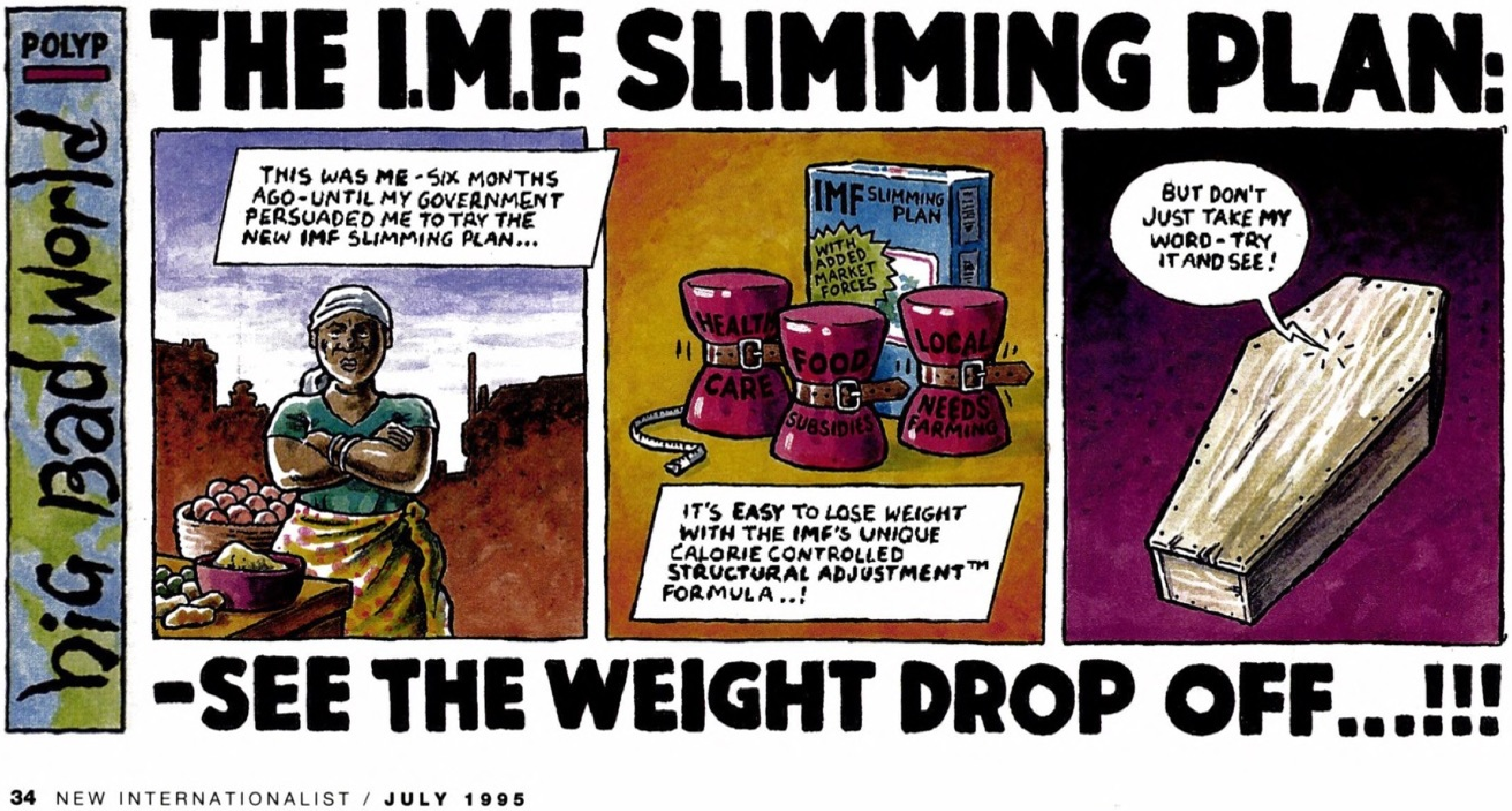
The February 1995 issue of NI informed us that 1999 will be the International Year of Ageing. What other themes are planned for 1996, 1997 and 1998?

Andrew Leigh
Pennant Hills, Australia

Are there any cultures in the world where there is never any reason to exchange gifts?

James Phillips
Wigston, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).


POLYP
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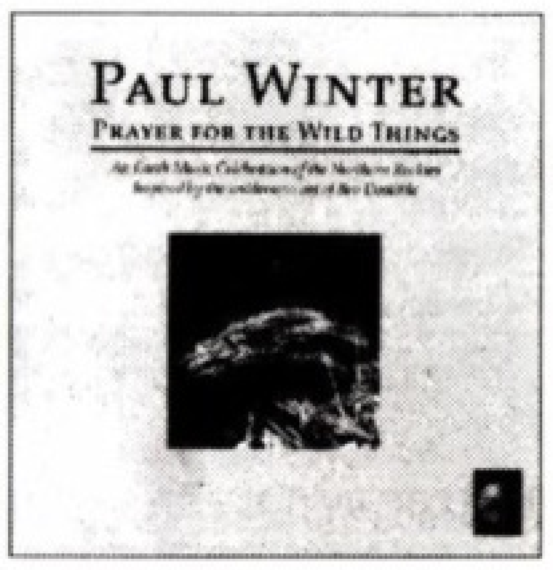

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The African village on film...

If you enjoyed last month's issue on life in an African village you may have been intrigued by mention of the **NI** film ***Man-Made Famine*** which first led us to the village. We are making the film available again on video because the issues it raises about the neglect of African women farmers are still as relevant today as they were ten years ago. And the lives of the women who tell their own stories on camera – Zenabou from Burkina Faso, Dena from Kenya and Cecilia from Zimbabwe – connect with us just as powerfully now.

Originally broadcast on Channel 4 and presented by Glenda Jackson, ***Man-Made Famine*** is a ringing call for justice for the women farmers of Africa. The film includes interviews with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, historian Basil Davidson and senior UN officials.

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A waste of hope

There are no adequate answers to genocide. But, argue **Rakiya Omaar** and **Alex de Waal**, the UN response in Rwanda has been counter-productive.

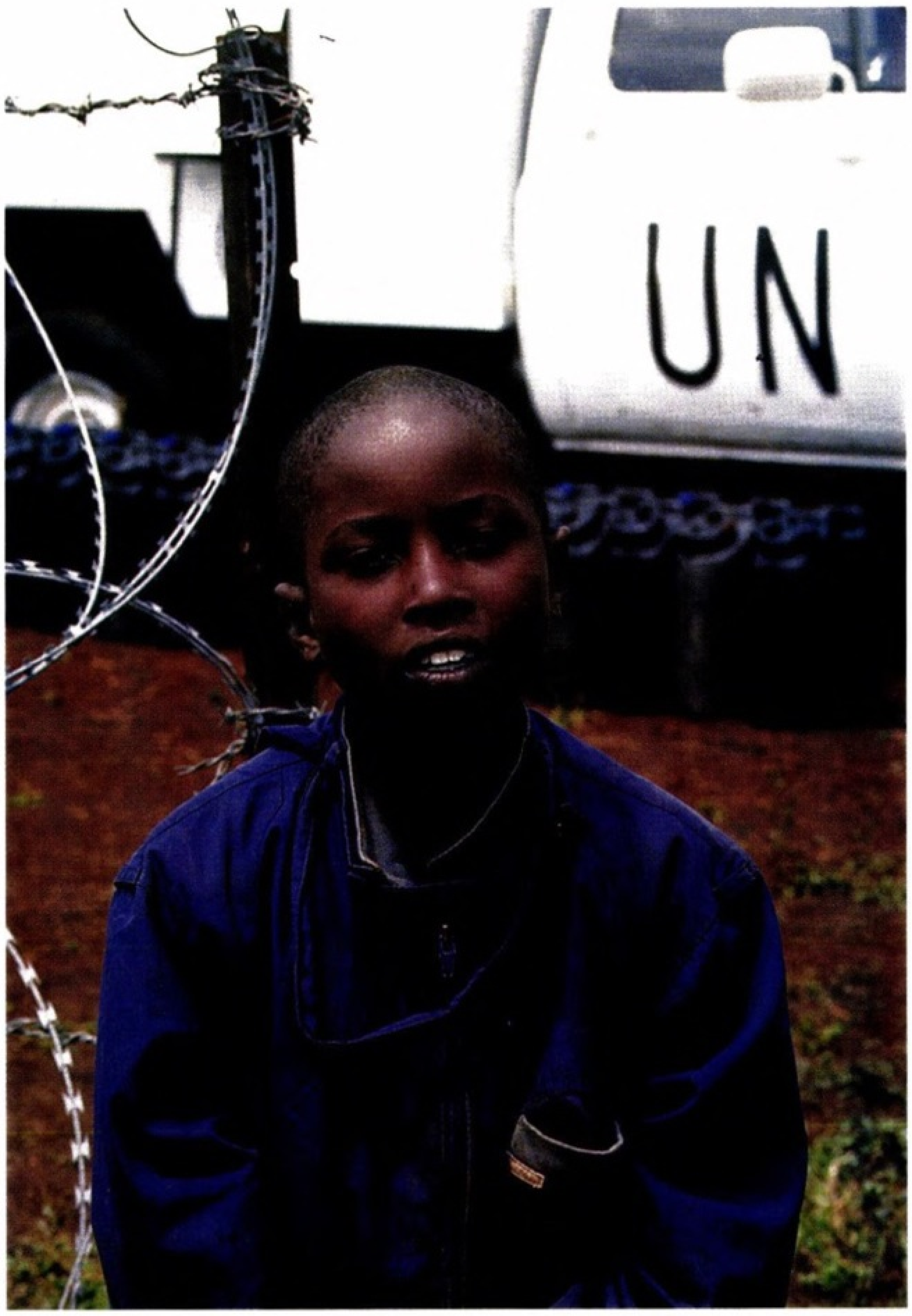
As the people of Rwanda struggled to come to terms with the catastrophe visited upon their nation by the genocide of April-July 1994, the creation of the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda (HRFOR) represented a moment of hope.

Formed with a model mandate that included assisting the investigation into the genocide, monitoring respect for human rights and helping to re-establish the basic institutions of a judiciary, police force and prison service, HRFOR appeared to be a tangible expression of international solidarity with the people of Rwanda. It was also an opportunity for the UN, whose reputation in Rwanda has been blighted by a succession of débacles, to redeem itself. Official statements still give the impression that all is proceeding according to plan.

Sadly, the truth is rather different. The evidence gathered over three months by African Rights is comprehensive and damning. One of the HRFOR monitors described the mission as 'a waste of time, energy and money. But worst of all, it is a waste of hope.'

No approach to human rights can establish – let alone retain – integrity and credibility without first investigating the genocide that colours every individual and every event in Rwanda. Such investigations were briefly on the agenda, but now they have been designated as the exclusive responsibility of the International Tribunal – set up to investigate the genocide – and the Rwandese judiciary. This forces HRFOR monitors into an extremely partial, even partisan role: their mandate is to prevent revenge attacks and protect those who are the targets of such attacks, sometimes impeding the Government's own investigation.

The problem of neglecting the genocide is compounded by inadequate attention to the normal procedures of human-rights investigation, such as protecting the anonymity of witnesses and scrupulous checking of facts. One monitor described the HRFOR teams as 'amateurs masquerading as professionals' and went on to describe a characteristic incident: 'I remember a meeting in which a monitor came back from Butare and described Butare as a region "in the grip of terrorism". He proceeded to narrate some of the stories he had been told. The reaction around the table reminded me of my first year as a criminal-law student. Everybody sat there saying "Wow, what a story!" and "Oh my God!" There were no questions about looking for the evidence.'



UN teams in Rwanda described as 'amateurs', obsessively concerned with 'going on patrol'.

HOWARD DAVIES / PANOS

Many of the monitors are young, inexperienced and unqualified, and have been sent to Rwanda with virtually no training and preparation. The stories of how monitors were recruited and despatched to Rwanda would make for comic fiction, were the issues not so serious. Monitors were hired over the telephone or by fax, without checking references. Many had no relevant work experience at all. In testimonies to African Rights the monitors describe how they were completely unprepared for the task that confronted them.

In a situation that is beyond their competence, and with inadequate leadership, monitors have been compelled to improvise. This has resulted in an obsessive concern with going 'on patrols', in extreme circumstances adopting an aggressive, paramilitary style. There has been little or no effort to support attempts by the Rwandese authorities to identify and arrest those suspected of active involvement in the genocide.

It is important to respect the rights of the accused. But it is also important to recognize that in Rwanda the overwhelming priority is to bring to justice those guilty of genocide – a formidable task in a country whose judicial institutions have been all-but destroyed. Without speedy progress, however, the impulses towards indiscriminate revenge and an entrenched culture of impunity make for an explosive political situation.

The poor professional standards of staff, lack of leadership and the distorted mandate have all eroded whatever moral high ground HRFOR might have enjoyed. Infighting and low morale have been the inevitable result. At immense cost precious little of substance has been achieved.

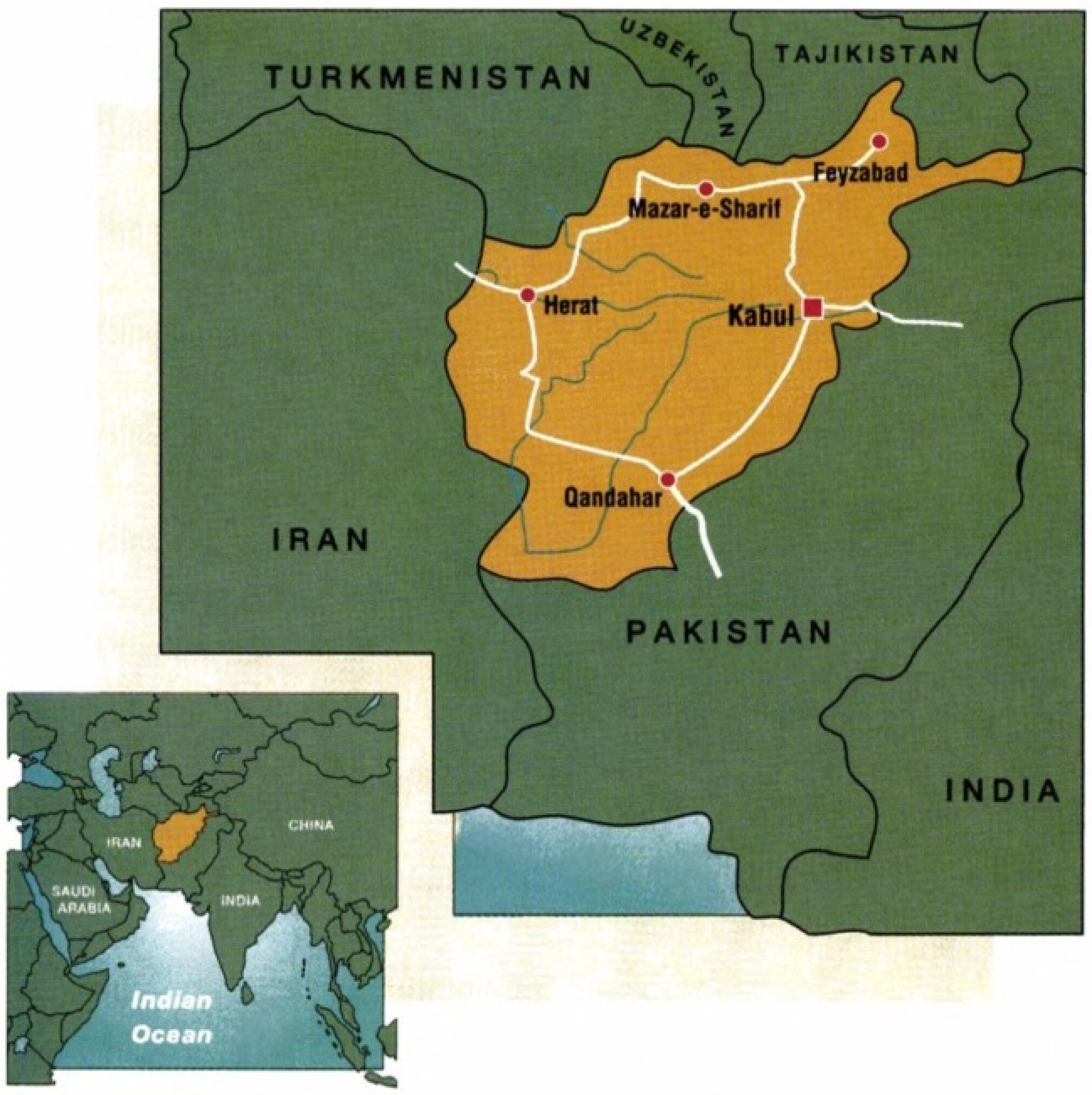
HRFOR has so far proven to be a waste of resources – both human and financial – and a betrayal of the hopes of the Rwandese people. The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has appealed for funds to continue the mission. This will be futile and counter-productive unless HRFOR is thoroughly reformed.

Rakiya Omaar and **Alex de Waal** are Co-directors of African Rights, whose report *Rwanda: a Waste of Hope* can be obtained from 11 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP, England.

Country profile

Afghanistan

AFGHANISTAN'S capital, Kabul, is now little more than a pile of rubble. Gunshots and explosions are almost as regular as the call of the muezzin to prayer. There are still over four million refugees inside and outside the country, up to ten million landmines on its soil, and around 100,000 amputees to be cared for. Yet the violent disintegration of this country – a staple of the TV news in the years when it could be dramatized as a Cold War battleground – is now ignored by the West.



Afghanistan is a rugged, landlocked country with the proud distinction of being one of the few countries that successfully resisted colonization by the European empires. Its borders were, however, still defined by the two Great Powers in the region – Russia and Britain – to provide a buffer zone during the 'Great Game', their struggle for power in Central Asia. Their geopolitical design left entire nationalities divided by borders, sowing the seeds of future conflict. Afghanistan's biggest ethnic group, the Pushtuns, for example, straddle the border with Pakistan while the Tajiks, who dominate the north, have close links with the people of Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic. Ethnic identity is vital here – you rarely hear anyone refer to themselves as 'Afghan'.

The superpowers continued the Great Game during the Cold War. Afghanistan's constitutional monarchy was overthrown in 1973 by a combination of Communists and Liberals, and in 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, fearing an Islamic resurgence throughout Central Asia. The Red Army soon became embroiled in its own Vietnam, as US arms poured into the hand of the Mujahedin ('holy warriors'). But the Mujahedin were far from united. Ethnic, political and religious differences plagued the resistance and infighting was as common as battles against the Soviet Army.

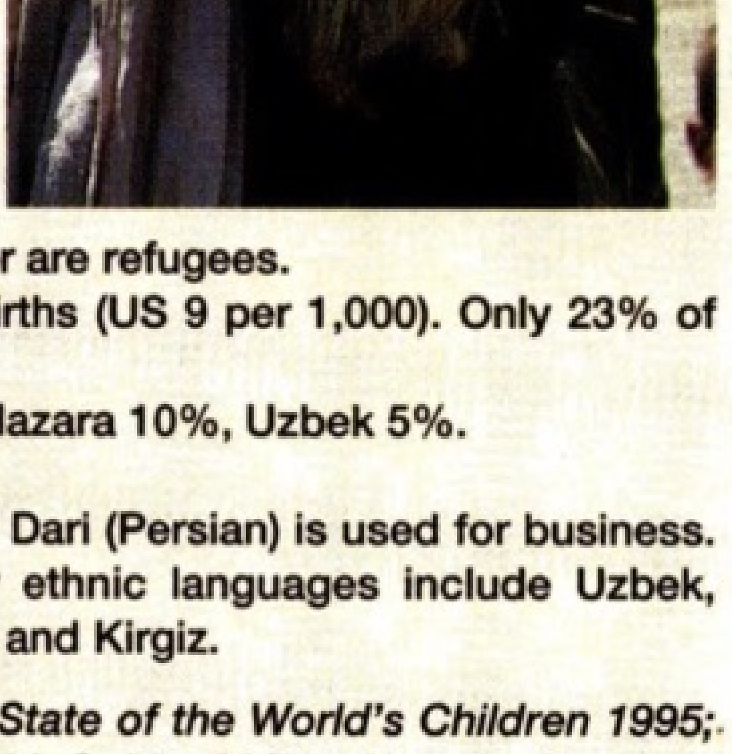
The Soviet Union cut its losses and withdrew in 1989. By 1992 the Mujahedin had taken Kabul – but within hours street battles between the various factions had erupted. These have escalated to the point where in 1994 over 15,000 civilians were killed by the fighting.

In October last year a new force emerged in the civil war. The Talibaan, a group of religious students, swept through the south of the country, promising to end the cycle of violence and to rid the country of arms and drugs. They have been stopped short of Kabul but stories of their religious zeal have fostered fears about the reactionary clerical state they might create. In the city of Qandahar, for example, the Talibaan attempted to ban soccer for being Western.

The northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, meanwhile, is controlled by Uzbek warlord General Rashid Dostum, an ex-communist well known for switching sides. The 'government' of President Rabbani holds sway over the capital and parts of the north. The central highlands belong to the mainly Shi'ite Hazara ethnic group. All these factions have so far failed to compromise – and no progress towards reconstruction can be made without that.

Stefan A Smith

AT A GLANCE


STEFAN A SMITH

Leader President Burhanuddin Rabbani – but he controls only part of the country.

Economy GNP per capita $280 (US $23,240)
Monetary unit: Afghani
Main exports: Natural gas, fruit and nuts, narcotics (cannabis and opium)
Main imports: Food, petroleum, fertilizers, arms and ammunition
The economy is now survival-orientated, a far cry from the days of large-scale agricultural production and export. The presence of up to ten million landmines has ruined the lives of millions of farmers, as well as creating some 100,000 amputees. Drugs have become the crop of the warlords, particularly on the border with Pakistan.

People 20.6 million, of whom about a quarter are refugees.

Health Infant mortality 165 per 1,000 live births (US 9 per 1,000). Only 23% of people have access to safe water.

Culture Pushtun (Pathan) 45%, Tajik 30%, Hazara 10%, Uzbek 5%.
Religion: Muslim – 85% Sunni, 15% Shi'ite
Languages: Pushtu is the national language. Dari (Persian) is used for business. The many ethnic languages include Uzbek, Turkoman and Kirgiz.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

Sources: *State of the World's Children 1995; Third World Guide 93/94; Human Development Report 1994; Asia & Pacific Review 1993/94; information supplied by the author.*

Previously profiled February 1986

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★
Money is now in the hands of the warlords who have looted the country.
1986 ★★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
The dependence of millions of refugees continues but Afghans have proved resourceful in avoiding complete catastrophe.
1986 ★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★
The status of women has fallen since the Mujahedin takeover. Amnesty reports the frequent rape of women by Mujahedin.
1986 ★★

LITERACY ★
29%. The education system has been destroyed by the fighting and a generation of refugees have had little or no schooling.
1986 ★

FREEDOM ★
No elections have been held since before the Soviet invasion. Civilian possessions are routinely seized by Mujahedin.
1986 ★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★
At 44 years, the lowest in Asia. Compares with a regional average of 56 and a rich-world average of 76.
1986 ★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★
Afghanistan is ruled by the Kalashnikov and rival factions have split the country on ethnic lines. Countless UN peace plans have failed in the last three years and will continue to do so as long as the warlords refuse to compromise.

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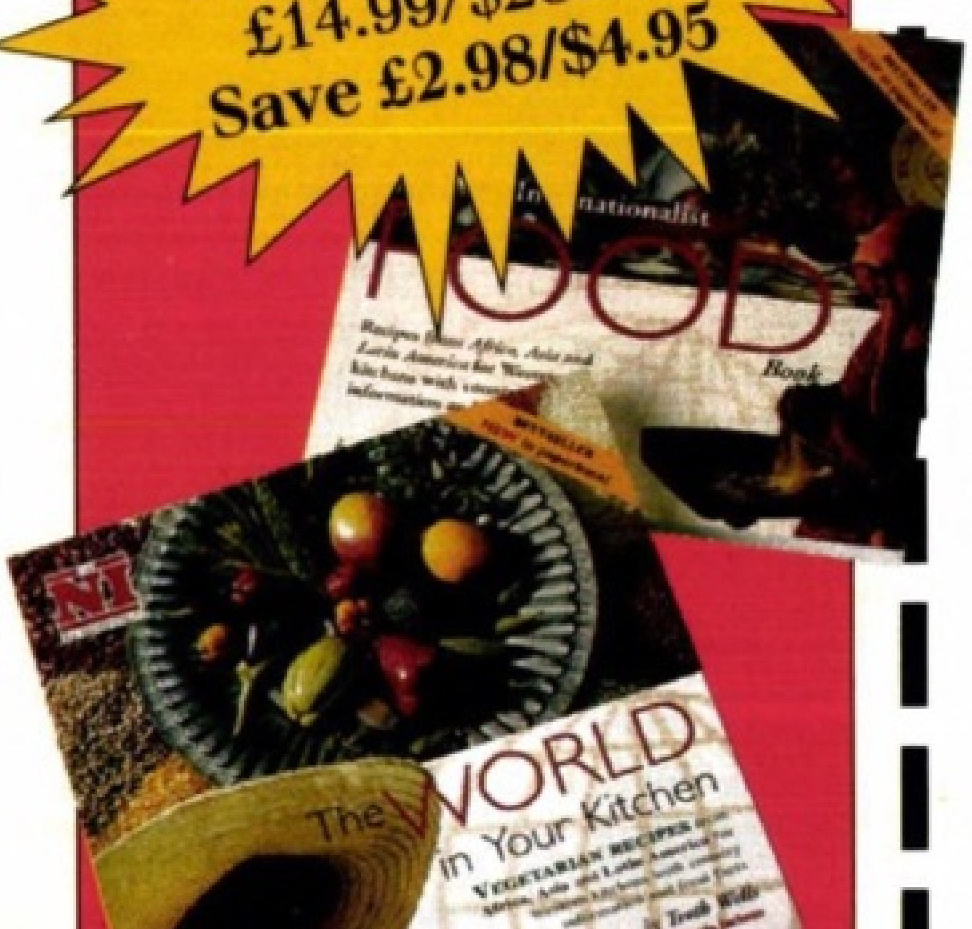

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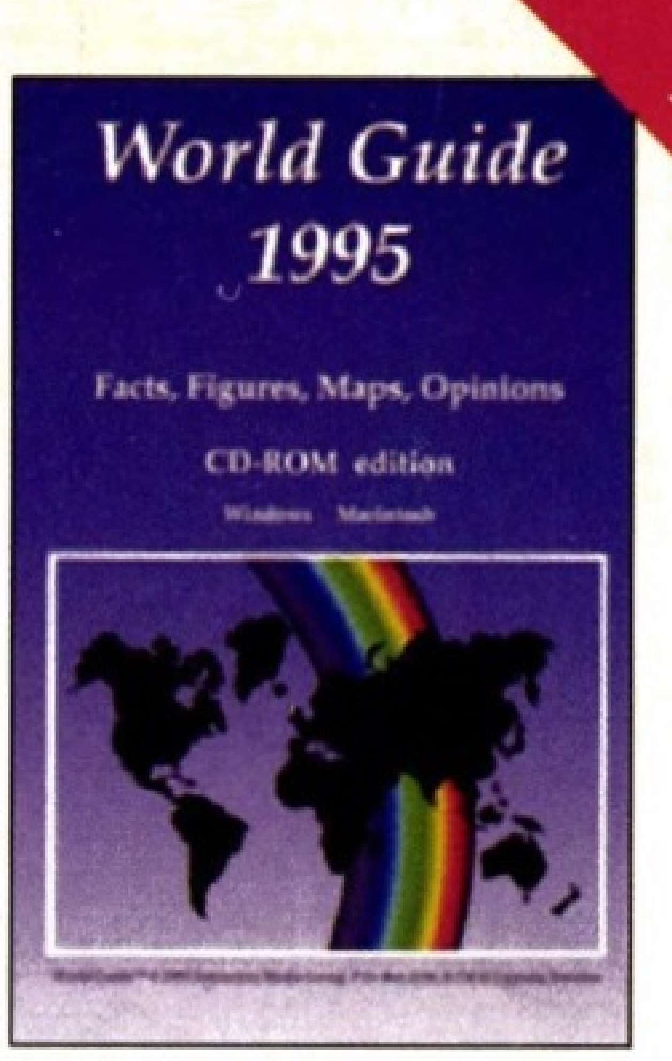

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